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CHRISTIAN COURIER

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Who can be saved? A new slant on an old debate ... p. 14



Me and Grandpa and the Malibu for a loonie p.12

59th year of publication

Religious violence in Maluku may have political motives

Harry der Nederlanden

In five days of widespread violence in Maluku almost 40 people were dead, Christian and Muslim, and over 200 injured. Another 2000 fled their homes to escape the carnage as mobs attacked people in the street and burned houses, churches and schools.

It was the worst outbreak of religious fighting since 1999, when similar violence caused over 6,000 deaths in three years of turmoil and turned some half a million people into refugees. A peace agreement was signed only two years ago, and for the people of Ambon life was finally getting back to normal. In some places Christians and Muslims were living side by side again and rebuilding neighborhoods that had been destroyed.

Violence broke out on April 25 when a small group of separatists

tried to hold a parade to celebrate the 54th anniversary of the Maluku's (once known as the Moluccas) unsuccessful attempt to assert its independence in 1950. Although the South Maluku Republican Movement is not supported by most Christians, its members are predominantly Christian. When the group attempted to hold its illegal parade, they were arrested by the police, but before they could be taken to the police station, they were attacked by a group of Muslims, which some claim was ready and waiting.

After the initial clash in which Muslims as well as Christians were killed, Muslim groups organized a retaliatory strike before sunrise Monday morning into Christian neighborhoods. Gangs of militants torched homes, churches and schools, including the Indonesian Christian University, the UN



A street scene in Maluku

building and other aid offices.

There is some disagreement among community leaders about whether the violence was a sudden flare-up of hatred that festered

former intensity and an uneasy peace was established, clergymen leveled charges that the incident had less to do with religion than with politics. Elections are scheduled for this summer. Democracy is but a fledgling thing in Indonesia. It was long ruled by the military, which is still constantly jockeying for power. Some clergy think the unrest in Ambon was deliberately stirred up by supporters of the military to make President Megawati look weak. The two men who are running against her are both former generals. One, General Wiranto, who has been linked to Muslim militias, has been indicted for war crimes committed in East Timor, another area with a substantial Christian population. Shortly after the violence started, a couple of extremist Muslim leaders

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Working Group presents argument for Civil Unions to Canada's Supreme Court



Supreme Court seal

Harry DerNederlanden

On May 12 the Working Group on Civil Unions, organized by Gerald Vandezande and bringing together an impressive group of Christian thinkers on public policy, submitted its "factum," or

intervention, to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Group has been working hard to put before the Court an additional option. The Supreme Court will consider the issue in October.

As matters stood, the government had put before the court only two basic choices: either affirm the traditional definition of marriage or redefine it to allow same-sex couples to marry. Since three provincial supreme courts have already ruled that according to the Charter of Laws and Freedoms (our law of laws) the traditional definition discriminates unlawfully against homosexual persons, it seems inescapable that, given the

options before it, the Supreme Court would almost certainly choose to redefine marriage.

The goal of the Working Group is to convince the court that to achieve equal rights for homosexuals, it is not necessary to do away with the primal definition of marriage. To provide for the recognition in law of other kinds of domestic relationships would be enough to satisfy the demands of the Charter. "Indeed," adds the Factum, "it is submitted that a civil union structure is the only impartial and neutral answer to the various concerns of inequality" that arise from the traditional definition.

If the Court opts for a new definition of marriage that includes same-sex relations, it is not thereby being non-discriminatory; it is discriminating against those who hold to the traditional view of marriage. "Instead of ushering in peace over this controversy," the document warns, if the Court redefines marriage, it "will have declared a victory for one conception of intimate relationships over those who hold a contrary view. In the interests of avoiding discrimination, this Court will have sanctioned a different form of discrimination embodied in an altered legal form of marriage."

Instead of arguing from a historical sameness of marriage in different cultures, the paper concedes that Canada has changed. Canada has gone from being a predominantly Christian country with different denominations to a country with very different faith communities. "In Canadian society today you find not just aboriginal, but also faith communities drawn from around the world with concepts of marriage that embrace different marital models, including polygamous marriage." Even same-sex marriage, inasmuch as it specifies a couple, is discriminatory over See Civil Unions page 2...

News

Maluku

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President Megawati at the UN

announced that they could send several thousand jihad fighters to the area to defend Muslims. The leader of Laskar Jihad, Jafar Umar Thalib, who was forced to withdraw after the violence of four years ago, said he had 10,000 troops ready to leave for Ambon if needed.

Understandably, the renewal of violence awoke intense fear in a people who have been the victims of systematic slaughter only a few years ago. Church leaders sent out a shrill and desperate cry for help abroad and to the UN as rumors spread that thousands of jihadists were headed toward Ambon.

According to Elizabeth Kendal of the World Evangelical Alliance, Wiranto is lagging in the polls. Since he's seen as a strong leader who promises to enforce order, he would benefit from conflict and instability. In 1999 sectarian conflict was similarly exploited to oust President Wahid and to strengthen the position of the military.

Father C. Bohm, a Catholic priest who runs the Crisis Centre Diocese of Ambon, was quoted by an Indonesian paper as saying, "One has the impression that the Muslim groups were prepared by outsider to act against Christian separatist activists."

The Jakarta Post reported: "Muslim, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian leaders ... said that 'provocation' was the best explanation for the violence...." A statement drawn

up by clergymen spoke vaguely of "third parties" who do not want to see peace in Maluku for "political motives."

Kendal concludes: "The locals have nothing to benefit and everything to lose." She passes on the analysis of the Maluku Shield Foundation, which notes that religious tolerance is prevalent in many areas of Ambon.

"For example, Muslims are looking after Christians' houses in Rumah Tiga and Poka villages, while Christians look after Muslims' houses in Latta and Lateri villages. Muslims from Wakal village secured Patti-mura State University campus in Poka village before a security group came to guard the campus. Muslims from Tulehu village (15 km east of the city) can pass all Christian villages safely along the way to the city in return for their security guaranteed for Christians in their neighboring Waai village. The majority of local Muslims in Ambon are not involved in the latest violence."

The Foundation reminds us that in the 1999-2002 conflict, "the provocateurs brought in people from outside of Maluku, like Ambonese thugs from Jakarta (Christians and Muslims), Laskar Mujahiddin and Laskar Jihad, to increase the level of violent activities in both communities. When Laskar Jihad and the thugs disappeared because of international pressures against terrorism, the violence automatically stopped because from the beginning the local people were



Wiranto as minister of defence

not interested in this bloody political game."

The Foundation says, "The issue may shift again because we know that the aim of the provocateurs is to make the Christians and Muslims fight one another as in 1999-2002. If they succeed in firing up a grass-roots conflict, the provocateurs will cry loudly that Christians are killing Muslims. This is a very inflammatory issue given that the majority of Indonesians are Muslim."

"So the issue may shift [from separatism] to religious solidarity, which would justify outsiders fighting in Maluku. The escalation of violence would justify the army declaring a civil or military emergency and taking over command for the security of Maluku. That will give two advantages to the army: (1) the army will argue that military leadership is better than civilian leadership, and (2) the army will regain their lost legitimacy in the eyes of the nation and the world. The army needs this standing to influence the presidential general election July 5, 2004, in which two retired army generals are nominated as candidates."

Martin Sieff of UPI also raised suspicion that, if not actually incited by pro-army provocateurs, the violence is probably being fanned and exploited by the army.

Although Indonesia is almost 90 percent Muslim, Maluku (like other hotspots in Indonesia) started out as predominantly Christian. In fact, under the peace brokered by the UN when the Netherlands was forced to pull out of its former colonies over 50 years ago, Maluku and East Timor were given the option of pulling out of the newly-formed nation if they so chose. When Maluku attempted to exercise its prerogative in 1950, however, Jakarta sent soldiers to quash the attempt, defying the UN.

To charge the political makeup of the area, the Indonesian military flooded it with Muslim settlers. Now the Malukus population is almost evenly divided between Christians and Muslims. Paul Marshal of Freedom House suggests that the violence of 1999 was a concerted attempt at ethnic cleansing to turn Maluku into a Muslim province.

[With stories from the World Evangelical Alliance Liberty News and Analysis, the Jakarta Post, Asia News, AP, and the Christian News Service.]

Civil Unions

....continued from p. 1

against a view of marriage that recognizes polygamy.

In addition, a growing number of Canadians don't get married at all but enter into relationships that aren't formalized in any way. Nevertheless, even in such cases the law imposes obligations on them (such as child support) that are like marital obligations: "By far the greatest portion of these people are in opposite sex relationships and not gay, lesbian or in some other domestic arrangement."

The civil union structure, the Factum argues, would extricate the government from trying to adjudicate among different religious traditions of marriage and the living arrangements entered into by those who embrace none of these traditions. It separates the religious recognition of a relationship from the legal, so that the government can focus on protecting the needs of the vulnerable and the best interests of children, while leaving religious communities free to celebrate their own unique traditions.

Civil unions as proposed by the Working Group (if I may draw an analogy) provides for the disestablishment* of the Judeo-Christian model of marriage by the

state, substituting for it what amounts to a civil registry by the government of a number of different kinds of relationships that involve legal obligations similar to traditional marriage. It would be a legal recognition of the pluralistic society Canada has become. The legal dimension of marriage, thus, becomes distinguished from the social and religious meaning. The actual marriage ceremonies, the traditional and religious exchange of vows, etc. would be left to the church, the synagogue, the mosque or wherever the partners choose to solemnize the occasion, if at all.

"By avoiding entirely the category of marriage, Parliament would leave both faith communities and other communities to define the non-legal incidents of marriage for themselves," the Factum argues. "The social acceptance which flows from freely accepting rights and obligations to another person would be available to all on a basis that would be neutral to their own conceptions of marriage."

*[*Disestablishment, of course, refers to the removal from favored and protected status a particular denomination. Similarly, in the realm of education the Reformed community has argued for the disestablishment of public schools.]*

United Church to defend same-sex marriage before the Supreme Court of Canada

Toronto (Press Release) – Canada's largest Protestant denomination, The United Church of Canada, announced April 23 that it has been granted the right to intervene in the Supreme Court hearing on same-sex marriage scheduled for October.

The United Church argued that as one of only three Christian churches that perform same-sex marriages in Canada, it had a direct interest in the issues being raised. It also said that the United Church would offer a unique perspective by bringing philosophical, religious, social, theological, and moral arguments that support equal marriage for people regardless of their sexual orientation.

The United Church in its news release also suggested that in a debate that is too often characterized as pitting people of faith against each other or secular equality values, the Supreme Court needed to hear the perspective of a mainline Christian church that sees same-sex and opposite-sex couples as being equal in the eyes of God.

The United Church believes that, "Christian morality and religious principles require that same-sex couples have access to the same marriage rights as opposite-sex couples."

In the conclusion, the United Church offered a note of optimism:

"The United Church has embraced the challenges that have arisen from issues of sexual orientation over the last twenty years, and can bear witness that issues of sexual orientation can be resolved in a context of respect for different positions, with integrity, and can lead to principled decisions being made that are based on a commitment to justice and law for all. The United Church believes that such decisions result in a more inclusive community, where healing of past divisions can occur, and where the total community becomes healthier and more enriched."

News

Muslim 'protest' turns deadly in Nigeria**As many as 30 dead, 300 injured in retaliatory attack on Christians in Kano.****Obed Minchakpu**

KANO, Nigeria, May 13 (Compass) — On Tuesday, May 11, thousands of Muslims in the northern city of Kano took to the streets in protest against recent attacks on fellow Muslims in the town of Yelwa in nearby Plateau state.

Sources on the scene say the confrontation turned violent. Police officials place the death toll as high as 30 and say another 300 have suffered injuries. Thousands are believed to have fled their homes.

Properties belonging to Christians were either looted or destroyed by the Muslim protesters, according to officials.

Kano state police commissioner Alhaji Ganiyu Alli Dauda told journalists yesterday that Muslim mobs were trapping Christians in their homes and setting the houses on fire, attempting to kill those inside. He

said police were under a "shoot-on-sight order" issued to save innocent lives.

"The order is out of necessity because you find that houses were being burned and there are people inside," Dauda said. "We have been compelled to shoot in order to rescue them."

The Kano attack comes in retaliation for the violence that erupted in Yelwa on May 2, in which Christian militia killed scores of Muslims. The governor of Plateau state, in a radio and television broadcast on Tuesday, said about 65 persons were killed. Associated Press reports placed the blame for that outbreak on a bitter land dispute between the predominantly Christian Tarok ethnic group and Muslims herds-men of the Hausa-fulani tribe.

Christian sources in Nigeria say conflict began with the February 23 attack by Muslim militants on the Church of Christ

in Yelwa, which resulted in the death of Pastor Samson Bukar and 48 members of the church.

Whatever the motive, the bloodletting is claiming hundreds of lives, according to the few eyewitness reports coming out of the area. (Compass required an armed escort to get into Kano in order to file this report.) Police Commissioner Dauda said that, of the 30 Christians killed, five died on Tuesday and 25 yesterday. He estimated that as many as 10,000 Christians displaced by the attacks have taken refuge in army and police barracks.

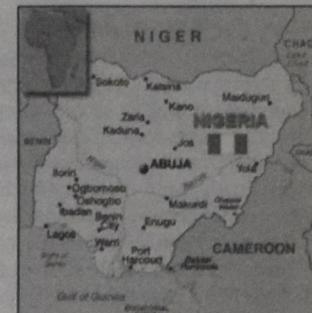
Sheik Umar Kabo, chairman of the Kano state Council of Ulamas (Islamic Clerics), in company of other notable Islamic leaders, reportedly led the Muslim protest that sparked the attack on Christians in Kano.

Plateau state governor Joshua Dariye said he believes the attacks on Christians are motivated by



President Olusegun Obasanjo with Senate President, Chief Adolphus Wabara at the official inauguration ceremony of the Regional Parliamentary Committee on the Lake Chad Basin holding at International Conference Centre Abuja.

State House Photo: Tunde Ojetade



Muslim militants with an agenda to carry out jihad (religious war).

Dariye told journalists yesterday in the city of Jos that extremists with ties to the Al-Qaeda network are behind the incessant Muslim-Christian conflict in Plateau state. The governor said his administration discovered "linkage" between Al-Qaeda and the Council of Ulamas, prompting him to ban the ulamas from Plateau state last December.

"They are part of the problem," Dariye said, referring to the Council of Ulamas.

"They (Muslims) are fighting a jihad. It is like celebrating 200 years of jihad, because (Islamic) jihad was fought in 1804 (in northern Nigeria)."

"Because they know that Plateau state is a Christian state

and they could not capture it through jihad, they have decided to use religious conflicts ... to make us Muslims by force."

Meanwhile, the Council of Ulamas visited Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo on Tuesday in Abuja to demand he declare a state of emergency in Plateau state.

Obasanjo reportedly assured the Muslim leaders that he would do all he could to find a solution to the problem.

"Whatever will be done will be done," he said. "We cannot allow lawlessness to be the order of the day. We have reached a stage where a permanent solution should be found."

Indian churches hail the defeat of Hindu-nationalist government**Anto Akkara**

New Delhi (ENI) — Churches in India have hailed the defeat of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at a general election in the world's largest democracy.

Results showed that millions of India's poor rural people forsook Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Hindus-first message despite an economic boom and moved their support to the secularism of the India National Congress party, led by Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Vajpayee conceded defeat on Thursday after campaigning on the slogan "India Shining", but miscalculated support for a campaign hoping to capitalise on the country's eight per cent growth rate on the back of booming high-tech industries and rapid development.

"This is a mandate to renew secular democracy in India," said the Rev. Ipe Joseph, general secretary of National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), a grouping of 29 Orthodox and Protestant Churches in India. Joseph told Ecumenical News International: "By ejecting the NDA government out of power,

most of the voters have shown that they reject the [Hindu] fundamentalism."

The opposition Congress party looked set to win enough seats to secure a coalition government along with smaller parties including the Communists, who had assured their support for a stable and secular government.

The Rev. Donald De Souza, spokesperson of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), said: "The election result shows beyond doubt that democracy is very much alive and deeply rooted in the secular ethos of the country." He told ENI that the Catholic Church "welcomes this verdict wholeheartedly and congratulates the voters for making clear their option for a secular government that will carry with them all sections of the society".

Indian voters were "intelligent and discerning", noted the national church council's general secretary, Joseph. He said they "rightly rejected the BJP bluff of 'India Shining' and 'Feel Good' campaign" in voting out the government that called the elections 10 months ahead of its five-year tenure in the hope of securing a stronger mandate.

Anand Sharma, spokesperson for the victorious Congress party,

said in an interview at the Congress office that the "India Shining" campaign of the NDA "demonstrated their insensitivity to the struggling farmers, unemployed youth and the poor".

"This alienated large sections of the society," said Sharma battling to make himself heard against the din of fire crackers and dancing inside the party office. "The people have now reposed their faith in our party and we will try to rise to their expectations."

Joseph said that the NCCI's "vote consciously" campaign urging Christian voters to exercise their votes against fundamentalist forces "did create an impact at least in Christian areas." In the run up to the election, all churches had issued "voter guidelines" asking the Christian electorate to vote for secular political parties committed to communal harmony.

This appeal by churches apparently came during a spurt of anti-minority violence and propaganda targeting Christians and Muslims during the tenure of the BJP-led coalition government.

Hindus account for about 81 per cent of India's one billion people while 12 per cent are Muslims, 2.3 per cent (some 23 million) are Christians and just less than 2 per cent Sikhs.

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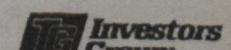
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Editorial

Looking at pictures

Harry der Nederlanden

Abhorrent, shameful, degrading, shocking, humiliating – everyone was searching for adjectives to describe the pictures that came from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and their reactions to them. Naked men wearing hoods forced to climb on top of one another like a group of cheerleaders making a pyramid. Peeking up from behind them, the face of an American girl smiling gleefully, a girl who might in fact have been a cheerleader only last year. An Iraqi prisoner being led by a leash out of his cell, naked and on all fours like a dog. Again the soldier holding the leash is female. She, too, looks as if she's enjoying her role tremendously.

They look like images from a porn movie involving sado-masochistic rituals. And Rumsfeld told a congressional committee there are hundreds more such pictures, even some videos. Prominently featured in the pictures are clean-cut American young men and women taking great delight in debasing the prisoners in their charge. They pose and clown for the camera without a qualm of conscience like college students on Spring break. Parents across America shuddered.

The photos prove the old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words. They sent waves of outrage throughout Iraq and the Muslim-Arab world. They sent waves of alarm through the US military and up the chain of command, even into the White House. Quite a few people are calling for Rumsfeld's resignation, not all of them rabid Democrats. The pictures also sent waves of horror through the American people, who have been picturing their sons and daughters as engaged on a noble and ennobling mission to spread American freedom to backward parts of the world. The shock waves, indeed, traveled around the globe, but in some places they were received with glee – as a corroboration of American domination and decadence.

The first time I saw the pictures, they impacted me viscerally, like a kick in the stomach. I felt sick. If the awful toll on life in Iraq on both sides is to yield any good fruit, everything depends on winning the cooperation of

the Iraqi people. Only then will order and government and eventually a working economy be established. My heart sank and also my hopes when I saw the pictures. I'm afraid they do almost irreparable damage to the small, fragile bonds of trust that have been laboriously developed in some areas. Just when I thought the worst possible thing that could happen had happened – the rise of the Sadr insurgents and the unmeasured response of the US military – these pictures appear.

I've been gathering stories and commentaries to follow the range of responses. The first were expressions of abhorrence and revulsion and even of disbelief. Were the pictures real? Who would be stupid enough to pose for such pictures? Surely the military, knowing everything depends on winning Iraqi minds, wouldn't do this kind of thing! They played right into the hands of Al Qaeda and the Islamists, who have been portraying America as Satanic, the source of all sorts of immorality and perversion.

After the initial shock and disbelief, came the tosh-tosh school of commentary. Yes, the pictures are shocking and degrading, but they aren't typical of what our American soldiers are doing over there, and they aren't symbolic of the democratic way. On the contrary, a chorus of voices protested, they violate everything America and democracy stands for. But, then, you have a few bad apples in every crowd. These are the actions of a few individuals who have disgraced their uniforms.

Even an Arab professor teaching in the US and interviewed on TV tried to downplay the matter. There are incidents of human rights abuses in every war, he said, and this is mild compared to most such atrocities. Will it outrage Islamic militants? Yes, of course, but they're already outraged and angry at America. Their opinion of America is already so bad, he suggested, that the pictures change little.

Former soldiers also chimed in with the tosh-tosh chorus. Yes, what the prisoners were subjected to is degrading, but that's part of interrogation, part of being a prisoner, in fact. This is nothing compared to the torture that has been inflicted by other regimes. Think of the tortures and murder committed in Abu Ghraib under Saddam's tyranny. There's no comparison.

But there is, argued David Brooks, an analyst: seeing Americans torment Iraqis in the same place where Saddam tortured them signals a certain continuity between the old regime and the new. The treatment of Iraqi men seen in the photos may look more like humiliation than torture to us, but in the Muslim world they look worse. It's one thing for a Muslim man to endure pain; it's another to be humiliated and shamed. In the first case, he retains his honor; in the second, he loses it, he loses his manhood.

The soldiers couldn't have picked a more effective way to demoralize their captives than to subject them to such degradation at the hands of women, said several commentators familiar with Arab culture. For that reason, several felt that the abuse was not the doing of a few rogue soldiers with too much power and time on their hands. It looks calculated to "soften up" their resistance, that is, to undermine their self-respect and render them compliant.

If it was part of a wholesale and authorized mistreatment, who must be held to account? More than just the soldiers assigned to prison duty. Was it authorized by the interrogators contracted from outside? By the military brass in charge of Iraq?

The Bush administration, some argue, created a culture of impunity that has infected the whole project. Just as it brushed aside world opinion and international law in its invasion of Iraq, it has brushed aside rules for the treatment of prisoners of war – not just in Guantanamo but in the military prisons of Iraq as well. This inculcates the attitude throughout the command that they can make their own rules. Nothing can be more dangerous to discipline.

Oh, come down off your moral high horse, Bush's defenders will reply. It's not as if the abuses were uncovered by journalists (or clergymen), and that the administration cultivated the abuse until the pictures created a public outcry in Iraq and America. The whole sorry business was already under investigation by the military and the administration months before the newspapers got hold of the pictures. Abuses took place, but they were not being condoned.

Numerous churches and church organizations have been issuing statements to tell the US government that treating prisoners like that is an unchristian thing to do. As if that has not already been recognized and acknowledged! I won't join the finger-wagging brigade. I'm not at all sure that this is a healthy relationship for the church to adopt vis-a-vis the government – to be always the wagging finger: 'Shame on you! Again you've betrayed your violent nature!'

It is to always speak from a position of moral superiority. Indeed, in their reflections on the weakness betrayed by those soldiers who collaborated in the abuse, some have pointed out that this attitude of moral superiority may be partly to blame. The way that America (and the entire West) has related to Arab and Muslim countries has been from a position of moral superiority. We see ourselves as the bringers of freedom, democracy, free enterprise and women's liberation to those still dwelling in darkness. This invests some soldiers with a sense of idealism and purpose, providing a source of strength and integrity. But it can also be a source of weakness. Moral superiority can lead us to see the other as less than fully human, or our cause as so high that we may use any means to achieve it.

Everyone who has been touched by this scandal has been sullied, including those of us who sit in Canada and who have held ourselves aloof from the entire fiasco. I'm not sure I can explain why, but I feel it. Anyone who, like myself, has worked in an institution or role that gives you undefined power over others who have little power over toward you will have experienced either directly or at one remove how easily that relationship can be abused. I worked in a psychiatric hospital for a number of years and saw how important rules, discipline and supervision are in such a situation. Employers, too, need to have checks on their power to exploit employees. Such checks are necessary in every sphere of life because everywhere the devil preys not just on our weaknesses but also on our strengths. That's why Christians embraced democracy.

The only way to look at the pictures from Abu Ghraib is confessionally – confessing our solidarity in sin – confessing, too, that we are unable to lift ourselves out of the quagmire in which we find ourselves. It is a time for mourning and repentance, a time to call upon the name of the Lord.

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Letters

History revisited

Two comments about two different articles that appeared in the *Christian Courier* of April 12. The first one relates to Lowell Witvoet's comment, "trying peaceful means (remember Chamberlain?) to deal with the evil designs of dictators and tyrants is useless."

I'd like to make a comment about Chamberlain. History has not been kind to Chamberlain, but has the portrayal been fair? Witvoet conveniently forgets that it was Chamberlain who was prime minister when Britain declared war on Germany.

Perhaps even more important for an interpretation of Chamberlain's record is the British budget after 1936. The budget indicates that Britain was already preparing for war in 1936! The increase in military spending benefitted especially the air force, and we know how it contributed to Britain's defence.

By ignoring two important aspects, Witvoet, like so many other critics of Chamberlain, has not done justice to the British prime minister.

My second comment deals with a picture accompanying the article "The treasures of the Egyptians," or more precisely the words accompanying the picture, "The temple of Ramses II the despotic ruler who oppressed the Israelites."

A quarter of a century ago I wrote a thesis about Exodus 32, the story of the golden calf. From the literary and archaeological evidence I concluded that the story would best fit the time of Ramses II. That conclusion differed significantly from earlier, conservative scholars, who put the date about 400 years earlier. A few years ago the Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen wrote a very convincing article that basically sided with an earlier dating. Kitchen's article puts my dating, and that of most modern scholars in doubt. So, maybe Ramses II was not the "despotic ruler who oppressed the Israelites."

These two small examples show how careful we have to be with references to history.

Yours truly,
Bert den Boggende,
Brooks, Alberta

You're right, Bert. And Mr. Chamberlain had a much friendlier disposition than Churchill too. So we apologize to Chamberlain and his descendants. We do not, however, apologize to Ramses II, no matter if he was a god and commissioned some magnificent statuary. Even if he didn't oppress the Israelites, he made life miserable for quite a few others.

Support a Christian friend

Recently I was reminded of the plight of Mr. Scott Brockie, the Toronto printer who was hauled before the Human Rights Commission for refusing on religious grounds to print material for Toronto lesbian & gay Archives. Financial support for Mr. Brockie is still ongoing, and donations can be made at any Royal Bank Branch, but one must have the following numbers handy. "Account # 507-721-9 Branch # 3132, cash only." Or send a cheque "Support for Mr. Scott Brockie #507-721-9" to 33 City Drive, Mississauga ON L5B 2N5.

Is it not upon our way to support a Christian friend who put his livelihood in the scale for his Christian conviction and has become one more victim of the God-denying courts in Canada?

Yours,
Wm. Veldboom,
Chatham.

A more simplistic approach

Even though I am totally disinterested in anyone writing a letter on my behalf, I took up the challenge and compared the two letters to our Prime Minister. The first one I discarded as being too long and not totally reflective of my views.

The second letter composed by John Bolt was rather intriguing, but I found it somewhat too complex with so many issues fused and intertwined. A more simplistic approach, something that comes to the point quicker, would have been my preference. Perhaps something like this:

Dear Prime Minister,

I must say that am really ticked off that your country did not become a member of our coalition. It would have been so easy for you to do and help us to look for the weapons of mass destruction. We told you that they were there. How could you dismiss our entreaty so easily?

Yet, I must admit, that so far no weapons of mass destruction have been found. A minor matter of no importance. Perhaps it should have been called a war on terrorism from the very beginning.

Sorry about suggesting that those two trailers were a threat, and that the chemical plant was a pharmaceutical factory. We can't always be right.

Want to hear something funny? The drone that was found was actually held together by duct tape. Imagine that: duct tape in Iraq!

You said that you would have cooperated if all was sanctioned by the United Nations. Is this really true? Or were you just annoyed that at times the United States didn't want your chickens, your potatoes, your beef, or soft wood lumber?

But you know what bothers me the most? After all the things we did for you! I think that you could have shown us more gratitude. Couldn't you just for once stop trying to think independently and just show us some cooperation? Don't you know that the good book says that the showing of gratitude is one of the blessed virtues? Don't you people read?

This letter may sound a bit harsh, but believe me, it is for your own good!

There, I've said it. I feel much, much better now.

Sincerely,
A friend of Canada
Tom Abma tabma@cogeco.ca

Re: Jesus and the media

Thank you for your article entitled "What the media and the scholars tell us about the Jesus of our faith" (May 10, 2004). I find your analysis fairminded, insightful and refreshing. It is a pleasure to see an intelligent layman apply some sanctified common sense to the self-assured speculations of a good deal of mainline biblical scholarship.

For readers who might be interested in pursuing this kind of approach on an academic level, allow me to recommend two publications by CRC-related philosophers: the book *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) by C. Stephen Evans, and the essay "Two (or More) Kinds of Scripture Scholarship" by Alvin Plantinga, most recently reprinted in *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig Bartholomew et al.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 19-57.

Long live the priesthood of all believers!

Al Wolters
Hamilton, Ontario

Re: Slofstra's letter April 26th, 2004

Now there should be little doubt why the 3rd generation of Dutch immigrants, my children, have very little interest in worshiping in the same church that I once called "my church." They, having grown up and gone to school with Canadians from every culture and religious background, have been taught tolerance and respect.

I would hope that it is not corporate church policy as to whom it would consider calling a "true" Christian. Yet when an individual church leader suggests he is a true Christian and decides who is worthy to wait for the Messiah with him, it's not hard to see why it's so difficult for a non-traditional guest/seeker to ever feel welcome in the church.

Surely God's grace is exceedingly abundant and his to give freely to whomever he wants, whether the recipient fits into the tiny box we created.

We may be surprised at whom we find in Heaven.

George Kloet,
Oakville, Ontario

Demonic principalities

Dear Editor,

The Church is never just preaching "in the pulpit," as I understand it, but should also speak to other societal institutions, including the state, about their respective policies with pastoral encyclicals. If the statements and rhetorical questions by CRC seminary church leader John Bolt in CC (26 April 2004) be a reluctant version of his preferred "silence," then to me it is evidence that the Church which says "nothing" to a government with a policy bent on war is, despite disclaimers, affirming the political policies at present in force. That has happened before in recent past history. Whoever supports "pre-emptive war" is, in my judgment, not following the path of Jesus Christ. True, one must not demonize any human individual, but demonic principalities do not drive only Muslim Fundamentalists.

The demonic principality of America FIRST or supraregional Militarism needs to be exorcized from our rhetoric so the people who vote can hear what the Scriptures proclaim: *not* "Those who develop weapons and armed missile shields will make us secure" (Jeremiah 9:23-24), but "Blessed are the just-doing peace-makers" (Psalm 146, Matthew 5:3-10).

Maybe, during these woeful days, we need a series of sermons "in the pulpit" from the biblical book of "Lamentations."

Sorrowfully for the USA, yours,
Calvin Seerveld
Toronto, Canada

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Letters/Writing

Will Stephen Harper and Paul Martin cooperate against poverty?



Paul Martin

Gerald Vandezande

As various conscientious observers have asserted: Incrementalism has shown itself to be an ineffective weapon in the war on child poverty. The question is: When will Ottawa decisively act with integrity for social justice?

During his victory speech, after gaining the Conservative leadership, Stephen Harper declared: "We need the Red Tory vision of important national institutions and sustainable national social programs because the Conservative party will never leave the vulnerable behind."

Mr. Harper can make his major promise come true now that Finance Minister Ralph Goodale has tabled the federal budget in the House of Commons.

The new Conservative Leader could challenge the new Liberal Prime Minister to demonstrate his brand of "Politics of Achievement," particularly its potential benefits for the powerless poor and Canada's defenceless children.

For instance, as the Toronto Report on Children (Volume 5, Update 2003) states: "2003 has not been a banner year for Toronto's children and families. Years of fiscal restraint and neglect by provincial and federal governments have taken their toll."

Canada urgently requires long-term fiscal forecast with clear-cut goals and equitable social policies – essential measures that do full-fledged justice to needy neighbors' awful predicament (homelessness and hunger) and their long-term future (adequate income security and affordable housing). Long-term challenges require long-term commitments. The PM and his Cabinet as well as Conservative Leader Stephen Harper and the spokespersons for the NDP and the Bloc Québécois owe it to Canadians to spell out where we are going and what it will take to get there.

All leaders could then become known as leading advocates for vulnerable citizens by actively sup-

porting comprehensive national policies and effective social programs. They could act on Paul Martin's 1997 declaration (when asked about the direction Canadian social policy should take): Yes, there are certain challenges. We have got to do for children what we have been able to do for seniors. The level of child poverty is a "disgrace," and there has got to be a great national effort to deal directly with that. (World Economic Affairs, autumn 1997.)

Thus, together, they would finally begin to implement the goal of the resolution unanimously passed in Parliament in 1989 to end



Stephen Harper

child poverty by the year 2000. ALL-PARTY action on a fundamental NON-PARTISAN issue!

The PM has valid reasons for his emphasis in the February Throne Speech on "strengthening Canada's social foundation" and reminding Parliament and Canadians: "The future for our children is, quite literally, Canada's future." Indeed, to quote Mr. Martin again: "We begin with our values – fairness, generosity, respect and caring."

Martin must now translate these core values into budget commitments that "build a fair, more equitably society" governed by deeds of justice and solidarity. Such overdue action must be "a great national effort" to deal directly with the disgrace "of child and family poverty in our country." Conservative Leader Harper also owes it to his party and Canada to remind the PM that a truly "back-to-basics" budget would rebuild the social programs on which the national well-being depends.

Ottawa can clearly help end the national scandal of Canada's social deficit by revoking the regressive tax cuts for such profit-hungry corporations as the big banks and powerful insurance companies. Parliament must now develop new revenue-generating sources that allow the social foun-

Writing as bleeding and beholding

"Sit down before your typewriter and open a vein," said Frederick Buechner, a writer more legendary than the machine to which he refers. The topic was preaching but he was mining his wisdom from the landscape of writers. Imagine your audience to be critical, if not hostile, he continued, and give your guts to win them over.

This talk was a pre-cursor to the Festival of Faith and Writing at Calvin College this past April. I want to share with you a little more of this speech, as well as some other literary jewels I picked up there, and maybe you'll be inspired to summer writing yourself.

Buechner, celebrated author of over 70 books and a Presbyterian minister, was speaking against our tendency towards superficiality in our communication. It is not only preachers who slip too easily into the fuzzy, the sentimental, and the simplistic. We assume that our group is all of one mind, and we neglect challenging each other towards a deeper level of engagement. We omit the terrible questions that lurk beneath the surface and are content with glib responses and religious clichés.

Tell your story, he urged us. Tell your story which is the story that Scripture tells: that we are made for joy, yet we get lost, we fall, and the rest is God's search for us. This is the story of Jairus' dying daughter, Peter's denials, Jacob the crook, and Rahab the harlot. The stuff of life.

Do not be afraid of focusing on yourself and your passion, he explained. For your story is the story of all of us. "Especially pay attention to unexpected tears," he whispered. "When your eyes suddenly water, and you have no idea why, pay attention, for it is a clue to something deep." The world is a ship going down in despair, he intimated, and you don't want to be the captain who doesn't believe it, who pontificates from the helm as it sinks.

"Let your story open questions, for we have too many answers," he went on. Our faith is not a mystery to be solved; honesty is enough, indeed, it is more than the usual fare. This does not mean full disclosure – spilling all the family details. It just means not getting lost in the business of life, such that we lose its passion. It is the passion of Christ, after all, where the "new creating" of all life begins.

From sacred to silly

Another speaker at the festival was funeral director and writer Thomas Lynch, author of *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*. In his speech he unveiled a ceramic miniature golf bag. "This is the cremation urn of the new age," he said.

dations of our society to be rebuilt. Such initiatives would produce a living legacy that would make Canada a beacon of hope and a land filled with social justice for all, without discrimination.

Stephen Harper and his party clearly have their political work for social justice cut out for them.

CAMPUS CULTURE

Peter Schuurman



Lynch explained how our culture, bereft of faith, migrates from the sacred to the silly. In the past, it was a common expectation for a designated individual at a funeral to say "Behold, I tell you a mystery," and then speak tenderly of a move to another shore.

"We now witness the triumph of the accessory over the essential," he elaborated. "The dead are turned into knick-knacks in a kind of funeral karaoke. Some finger food, a song and some merlot, and heaven is the 19th hole for those who kept an honest score." Whether its rainbow trout, potted mums, team pennants, or a casket in the form of an athlete's locker turned on its side, the virtual and synthetic have replaced the grounded and the faith-full.

"This is the job of writers: to witness and keep track of such things," he concluded.

Faith versus writing

Finally, religious writer Barbara Brown Taylor urged us to fall in love with words rather than dogma. "The word 'behold' has more concordance references than 'believe,'" she said, explaining that writers "behold" life as it is, while religion confines people to "belief" in what ought to be. In effect, Taylor drove a small wedge between faith and writing. While this dualism is unnecessary, she made her point clear: we need to take more time to simply look.

"We need to pay attention to reality," she elaborated. This means developing a reverence for the world, an immersion in the sanctuary of creation. Religion too quickly devotes itself to what is right, and misses what lies before your nose. "Religion can be a way to flee life, freeze-drying faith into spoon-sized doctrinal statements," she opined. "Faithfulness to life on earth is a pre-requisite to faith in God. By 'beholding' we can meet what we see; name, frame, but never disqualify or trim away what does not fit."

There were numerous other writers sharing their trade secrets at this festival, not to mention musicians, artists, and poets. Surrounding yourself with creative people is one way to stimulate the artist within. As American poet William Stafford put it, "Everyone starts out as a poet; the question is why some people stop."

Peter Schuurman, chaplin at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont., has been appointed Christian Reformed Home Missions' new Educational Mission Leader beginning October 2004.



Political integrity and social justice hang in the balance!

Gerald Vandezande is the former National Public Affairs Director of Citizens for Public Justice, the author of *Justice, Not Just Us: faith perspectives and national priorities*; *Volunteer Spokesperson for the Campaign Against Child Poverty*.

Letter/Calling

Troy – called to prison ministry

I have a friend who is in a maximum-security correctional facility serving a life sentence. What's more, he is named after me, along with a ministerial colleague who was killed in an automobile accident in the late 60s, Roy Boeskool. His name is Troy, The "t" and "y" for me, and the "r," "o" and "y" for Roy.

Troy was a biracial baby adopted by his young parents Rich and Carol who were serving the churches in Muskegon, doing community ministry. Rich had just been ordained to the ministry. They were extremely well motivated young people with a sort of liberal bent, and inter-racial adoption was the in-thing in the 60s. Our sons used to baby-sit Troy in those days.

Our ways parted and we had virtually no contact with Troy or his parents. All that we knew about them was good. But out of the blue we heard that Troy had gotten into bad company and was given this horrible sentence. Further news about Troy was not good either. Because of prison violations not even his parents were allowed to visit him. When once we spoke they hadn't seen him in four years.

Troy was a tough customer. We often prayed for him. But, wonder of wonders, last year his parents jubilantly informed us that Troy had undergone a radical conversion, and they showed us letters which utterly amazed us. The transformation was nigh unbelievable, but it was true. His letters were living epistles.

At that point I decided to get in contact

with Troy and have been corresponding with him since. I was curious about what had led him to a life of crime and what he had done to receive such punishment without having killed anyone, and what he could tell me about the grace of God that changed his life. It has been an extremely interesting past year.

In the course of our correspondence, I asked Troy to tell me the whole story. It took him twelve single-spaced typed pages to set it all out. I'll try to condense it into a couple of pages and draw some conclusions. Troy attended the Muskegon Christian schools along with his younger brothers. He says: "For thirteen years I was raised as, and thought I was, a white child. I had no reason to think or believe I was any different than the members of my family." One day, in about the sixth grade, that innocence came to an end. A friend asked why it was that he was black and his family was white. Though biracial, he was very fair complexioned and he had never really noticed he was that different, and it hadn't mattered. That question shocked him to the core of his being. Suddenly he didn't belong to his family.

That was the turning point in his life. From that day he felt alienated and began to hold deep-seated resentment – toward his family and the world in general. His family felt the brunt of his emotional turmoil. He stole from them, fought with them, tormented them, and rejected them.

Having lost his emotional strength, he resorted to his physical ability to pursue a life of theft, alcohol, sex and drugs. He found life in the streets with people of his color. He was in and out of juvenile detention. His one goal was to get money so as to be financially independent.

Once, while in a half-way house for released delinquents, he was invited to a Pentecostal-type revival service in which he underwent an amazing spiritual experience – profuse sweating in the pew, a coming forward, where he confessed his sins, all of them, a vision with a distant light and the figure of Jesus and a black-out that left him on the floor.

He found himself being revived by the attending clergy. But instead of causing him to rejoice in deliverance, he left vowing never to come near a church again. It had been too much for him. And he returned to a life of crime.

During this time he found he was to become a father, so out of duty he decided to marry the woman he had used in his lust. But by the time they were married, he had another child on the way by a friend of his wife. Before a year had passed, he and his wife had a second child, so he had a total of three children in one year. He was 19. And he was soon divorced.

But money is power and he had to have it, so he set out on a life of crime. He, a girl friend and her sister and her boy friend, were living out a Bonnie-and-Clyde interstate crime spree. They dealt in drugs and robbed whomever they could, especially other drug dealers.

After a year they came back to Muskegon and planned a serious heist. It was in February 1994. Troy was 24. They would rob a jewelry store and if necessary, kill the owner. Mike had the gun and would carry out the robbery but Troy was the instigator and planner.

He stayed in the getaway car while his buddies botched up the robbery, shooting the owner five times and leaving him critically wounded. They were arrested the next day. All plead guilty except Troy, who swore he had no knowledge this was going to happen. He was tried and given a life term as a habitual criminal.

Troy was far from a model prisoner. He dealt in drugs in the prison, resulting in years of "no visitors allowed." Then he plotted a prison break that was discovered and was given a year in solitary confinement, where he finally began to face himself. With nothing to do he began to seriously read the Bible. His mother continued to write him, assuring him of their love and prayers for him.

But the turmoil he had caused in his parents' lives finally brought her to a desperate confrontation with her son, in which she abjectly took blame for his wasted life in words too personal and private to reveal.

At that point Troy was finally struck with the wickedness of his spirit and life, got down on his knees and, with great sobbing, confessed his sins and sought the Lord. And the Lord answered him in grace.

Troy has found a new life of witness to the gospel with his fellow inmates. He has become a virtual evangelist. Looking back on his life as one who believes in God's guiding providence, he even sees how his life of crime has equipped him to understand and relate to others who have lived that same way. He speaks with the authority of one who has walked in sin and found salvation. He has little hope of ever being released from prison. He has dropped his appeal.

He writes: "God sat me down one afternoon and asked me a question. 'Do you trust me?' 'Yes Father, I do.' 'Then give me your case and you do my work and I will see you through.' And that is exactly what I did. I took all the materials relating to my conviction and threw them in the garbage.

"The Lord gave me my own personal mission field in exchange. What greater opportunity in this world is there than to work directly for God, to bring Jesus Christ to people who are going to die and be separated from God forever.... There is nothing greater!"

He is burdened by the fact that he cannot be a father to the children he helped bring into the world. He has tried to contact the jeweler whom he victimized in the robbery attempt, confessing his sorrow. To date he has not heard from him but hopes somehow to bring about some kind of reconciliation. He visualizes a reunion of the students at Muskegon Christian and thinks of all the success stories. If he were there he would have his own "success" story – being called of the Lord to help save the souls of sinners. And he believes the Lord has reserved a place for him at the reunion table. He also believes Jesus is in prison with him and he identifies with Paul who called himself a prisoner for Christ.

Troy hopes to write his autobiography as a witness to God's grace. In closing he writes: "I wish you well, and the constant observance of the grace and peace of our heavenly Father in his Son, Jesus Christ." I'm wondering – would it be possible for Classis Muskegon to ordain him as an evangelist, to preach the gospel, baptize the saved and administer the Lord's Supper to the saints there gathered in prison? Why not?

Ty Hofman is a Yankee-Canuck and retired minister of the Christian Reformed Church, living in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Letter

Clarification of support for 'civil unions'

Your front-page article on the initiative of the 'Working Group on Civil Unions' (WGCU) (April 26, 2004) does not adequately convey my reasons for supporting this initiative. The long quotation attributed to me seems to have been reconstructed out of various phrases which I may have used in the course of the telephone interview with your reporter. But it fails to record my main reason for supporting the 'civil unions only' proposal (a reason I made clear in that interview).

That reason is constitutional. The clear advice of experienced lawyers closely involved in this issue is that the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) is almost certain to advise the federal government – in response to the government's 'Marriage Reference' – that the current heterosexual definition of marriage is discriminatory. They confidently expect the SCC to declare this definition in conflict with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and deem it unconstitutional. Parliament is then very likely to conclude that it has no choice but to expand the legal definition of marriage to include same-sex couples.

In my view this would produce an outcome at least as unsatisfactory and socially divisive as the current heterosexual definition is held by some (including some provincial courts) to have become.

Now parliament is the principal arena of Canada's representative democracy. On an issue of such far-reaching national importance as this, and where deep social dissensus clearly exists, it is essential for parliament to have a real say. Parliament needs to be given as much discretion as possible in deciding how to respond justly to this situation through any subsequent legislation.

The WGCU proposal would increase the number of real options available to parliament (from one to at least two). The central point of its intervention is to request the SCC to advise on whether the 'civil unions only' option passes constitutional muster and so is available for parliament to consider. That is why I am supporting it.

Jonathan Chaplin
Toronto



Church**Official launch of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands on May 1**

Westerkerk, Amsterdam

the merger of the Calvinist and Lutheran traditions, which could not achieve ecclesiastical unity at the time of the Reformation to form one Protestant church. The Hervormde and the Gereformeerde, brothers and sisters who had become estranged from a common home, are now reconciled in a restored fellowship.

"We thank God that we may experience this day of the church's union. In it we see a sign of God's faithfulness, which is much greater than the in-

ertia, fear and distrust that sometimes renders our efforts powerless. We rejoice in the Lord, who by his Spirit opens new horizons. Filled with hope, we desire to build further on the foundation that we have not laid ourselves — the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Every day anew we may live out of the Lord's calling to hear and to proclaim the Word. His faithfulness is new every morning.

"A common understanding of the Gospel now brings together Lutheran and Reformed traditions. We acknowledge our calling to generously share in our new fellowship what each of us have received in our own history.

We look forward with great

anticipation to the inspiration we may receive from one another. In doing so, we may also have our eyes opened to unanticipated aspects of God's love in Christ. This is how we want to take our place in the broader circle of churches in the Netherlands and beyond.

"We will pursue our road in devotion to one another. Unity is an enduring task, even now that we have taken important steps on that road. Over the last years, on the road to unity we have felt some deep tensions, which are still present and visible. We continue to feel our ties with those who could not join in this union.

"Even within one Protestant church we will not always understand one another. In the light of Scripture we want to persist in this conversation with one another. Therefore, we accept without reservations the calling to give form to a churchly style in which individuals, congregations and groups will feel safe with us.

"It is our longing that along this road our service to Christ and his Kingdom will receive new vitality. We call upon all those who join us herein not just to look to their own interests but also to those of others. In this spirit we open ourselves to all those outside our circle who confess the name of Christ.

"We go forward along this common road in trust. We know that the church does not belong to us;

we belong to Christ, and Christ is from God. Because we live by grace, his house offers us room and safety. This both determines and delimits our responsibility. We entrust ourselves to him that he may bless the Protestant Church in the Netherlands to make it a sign of unity and hope in the midst of our nation — a church which makes God's love for all the people of the world visible.

"Therefore, we pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to bind us together and unify us. Come, Holy Spirit, renew your church."

A large number of congregations (some 65) from the Hervormde and a smaller number from the Gereformeerde did not join in the merger. A representa-

tive of the Gereformeerde did not know whether they will be allowed to retain the old name. Confessional congregations that went along with the merger still have a grace period during which they can opt out.

The congregation from the Hervormde Church met on May 3 in emergency classis in 23 locations and they have scheduled further meetings. A spokesman for the interim leadership expressed sadness at the harshness with which some of its members have been treated. Not every congregation was sure it had a place to meet on Sunday.

[With stories from Friesch Dagblad and Reformatisch Dagblad.]

Survey finds religious commitment strongest among arts students

Chris Herlinger

New York (ENI) — Does spirituality animate US college and university students engaged in the arts and humanities more than their counterparts studying science or business?

Apparently yes, says a new survey conducted by the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA).

It concluded that religious commitment is strongest among students majoring in such fields as fine arts (62 per cent), education (59 per cent) and humanities (57 per cent) and lowest among majors in the field of biological science (43 per cent), history or political science (41 per cent), and sociology (37 per cent).

The latest findings of an ongoing national study of 3680 US college and university students by UCLA's Higher Education Research also found those most likely to be engaged in a "spiritual quest" were also among fine arts (43 per cent) and humanities (42 per cent) majors, but those least likely to be on such a path were majoring in business (24 per cent), computer science (23 per cent) and physical science (19 per cent).

Alexander Astin, co-author of the study, told Ecumenical News International the results seemed to confirm already-held stereotypes of the differences between those in the humanities and those in fields generally requiring more numerical and analytical skills.

Still, Astin said he was surprised by the findings, particularly the importance those in the arts and humanities placed on spiritual concerns, given the stereotype that those in the arts "are freethinkers and nonconformists who tend not to affiliate with traditional religions."

Ironically, said Astin, there were not enough religion majors included in the survey to obtain "reliable results" about spirituality among those studying religion. A larger survey planned for later this year will correct that omission, he said.

There were four general fields of questioning: religious commitment, spiritual growth, engagement in spiritual quest, and level of "spiritual distress" — a question centred on wrestling with beliefs and exploring spiritual issues.

Astin said he was disappointed that spirituality resonated so little with those majoring in fields related to the health professions. "Medicine would benefit enormously from greater spiritual awareness, or I should say patients would, for obvious reasons."

Nineteen majors were surveyed for the study and students participating in the survey attended 46 US colleges and universities.

CRC enhances Web presence with new look, more content

The web site, www.crcna.org of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), was re-launched on April 2, 2004, sporting a sleek new look and many other enhancements.

Regular visitors will immediately notice the new design, its first face-lift in three years. New menus and slight changes to the site structure are designed to improve navigation.

The most important changes are the re-organization of content and the introduction of CRCcom, a new communications site under the "What We Offer" menu.

In addition to the programs and opportunities listed on the old site, CRCcom features a new media section called "Press Room;" a re-organization of the resources; enhanced conferences and church calendar listings; plus some new communication tools for pastors,

church administrative staff, bulletin editors, and general CRC members.

"We wanted to offer people a one-stop source for news, information and resources related to the CRC, as well as to make the site more graphically appealing and easier to navigate," said Henry Hess, director of communications.

"Our agencies have lots of very useful resources, but people often don't know what is available or where to look for it," he noted. "This will make it much easier for people to stay connected and find the things they need."

Other significant changes include a new section devoted to giving, and improvements to the church finder. Visitors will be able to get directions to any CRC congregation in North America via a link to MapQuest.

The task of redesigning the site was a combined effort of the Communications Office, which manages the site content, and Product Services, which provides the technical expertise. While some sections still need adjustments and reorganization, the bulk of the site has been converted to the new look.

"Hopefully, users will find the new design more modern looking and easier on the eyes," said Dean Heetderks, director of Product Services. "What they can't see is the behind-the-scenes coding that has been completely rewritten for faster page downloads and greater accessibility by those not using "regular" browsers — people who are visually impaired, for example, use a special browser that reads web pages."

Church

First Toronto CRC withdraws letter announcing its intent to open offices to homosexuals

The Council of the First Christian Reformed Church of Toronto sent a letter to Classis Toronto after a lengthy congregational meeting on April 18 to inform its sister churches that it is withdrawing the "Open Letter" and the attached document which it distributed to Classis Toronto on October 10, 2002. This was the letter informing classis that First Toronto had decided to approve the nomination of homosexuals living in faithful committed relationships for ecclesiastical office.

In its latest letter, the council of First Toronto writes: "Based on the reactions we have received in the classis and, in particular, the resulting overtures, communications, and appeals to the Synod of 2004, the congregation feels that the position which it adopted at that time requires further reflection and discussion inside the congregation before being published. In fact, it was not responsible on our part to do so."

The letter further informs classis that, although First Toronto will have its position paper completed by September 2004 as promised, it fears "that further discussion at classis or synod will not be upbuilding or edifying for the denomination at this time. We suspect that we ourselves, by our unilateral ecclesiastical procedures, may have made it difficult for the classis or denomination to discuss this sensitive and complex topic without having a rancorous, polarizing and divisive debate."

The letter concludes by asking classis whether it still wants to get the paper prepared by Toronto.

To sum up matters as they now stand: After the church adopted the council's recommendation to open its offices to homosexuals living in committed relationships in late September 2002, Classis Toronto in a January 2003 meeting urged First Toronto to repent of endorsing homosexual relationships, to rescind the decision re nomination of office bearers, and to commit to ministry within the Synodical guidelines.

It also asked First Toronto to respond for the May meeting of Classis. At that meeting First Toronto didn't repent of its actions but said they would defer any such nominations and offered to present a study of the matter to Classis in September 2004. They asked that further action be deferred until then.

Classis Toronto, at another meeting held in June, accepted First Toronto's decision to refrain from acting on their previous decision as an adequate response to Classis' call to repentance. It asked First Toronto to present its study no later than September 2004.

In September 2003, however, Classis took back part of its June decision which said that First Toronto's deferral was enough; instead, it called it "an appreciated step" in the right direction.

As matters stand, therefore, Classis Toronto is still expecting First Church to repent of endorsing same-sex relationships and to

withdraw its decision to accept nominations for office of those who live in committed same-sex relationships.

What the effect of First Toronto's latest letter will be is unclear. But if First Toronto believes that this erases its earlier actions and that Classis Toronto and the CRC Synod will now proceed as if nothing has happened, this seems unlikely. The matter is sure to come up at Synod, if not this year, then next year, and the issue will still be every bit as hot, especially in view of the fact that it is dividing mainline churches and has become a political issue in the US.

UN hears evidence of Christian persecution in China but takes no action

NANJING, China (Compass) — Chinese Christians gave evidence of persecution at a special meeting called by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) in April. The speakers included Xu Yongze of the Born Again house church movement and Brother Yun, subject of the best-selling autobiography *The Heavenly Man*, who testified to beatings, imprisonment, torture and harassment. Female members of the South China Church also testified to torture and sexual assault at the hands of police officers. Their evidence was supported by official documents and a video showing the destruction of a church in Zhejiang province.

However, when the United States moved to censure China for its poor human rights record, 27 member states voted with China against the move. "You have a lot of authoritarian countries who are members of the UN and of the commission," Nicholas Bequelin of Human Rights in China said. "These states share with China the opposition to the scrutiny of their human rights situations."

Recently Sudan was reelected to the UN Human Rights Commission, its most important human rights watchdog, despite overwhelming evidence that it has been conducting a campaign of ethnic cleansing in Darfur, its western province.

United Methodist reverse decision; declare homosexuality incompatible with Christian teaching

Jamie Dean

PITTSBURGH (EP) — Over 1,000 delegates of the 8.2 million-member United Methodist Church (UMC) in the US gathered in Pittsburgh April 27 - May 7 for the denomination's quadrennial General Conference to discuss church business and plan for the future. But one issue overwhelmingly dominated the meeting — homosexuality.

It's an issue that is dominating discussions in several mainline denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Episcopal Church. But while pro-homosexual advocates continue to advance their agenda in those churches, the UMC seems to be at least slowing the pace in its own.

The Judicial Court of the UMC — the denomination's highest court — ruled May 1 that UMC law clearly teaches that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.

It seemed like an obvious deci-

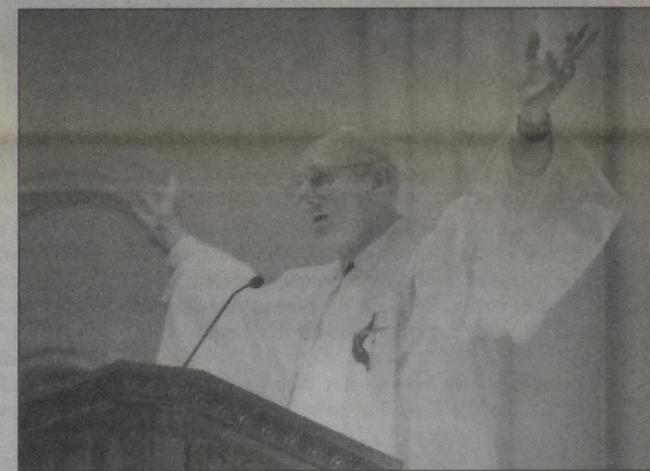
sion to make. Section 304.3 of the UMC Book of Discipline says, "Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed, practicing homosexuals ... shall not be appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church."

But the Judicial Court was compelled to affirm the church statute in the wake of a March ruling of the Presbytery of the Northwest that found Karen Damann, a UMC minister who is a self-avowed, practicing homosexual, "not guilty of practices incompatible with Christian teaching."

The Damann ruling created a firestorm within the denomination that came to a head at the General Conference. Both conservative and liberal delegates came to the meeting expecting an official statement from the church. That statement came in the form of the Judicial Court's ruling.

Conservatives praised the ruling, saying it upheld biblical truth and church law. "It's very important

because church law has been unchanged for three decades, but increasingly, certain local or regional jurisdictions have been unwilling to enforce church law," Mark



Closing sermon

Tooley, a spokesman for the United Methodist Action Program of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, told The Associated Press.

But Tooley warned that the question of homosexual clergy will remain unless the denomination passes legislation to more assertively enforce church law.

Three days after the Judicial Court's ruling, liberals proposed a measure that would officially acknowledge that there is division in the UMC over the issue of homosexuality. The delegates rejected that measure on a 527-423 vote.

"Jesus clearly said from the beginning of creation God made them male and female," said the Rev. Eddie Fox, who spoke against the measure. "We must not give a message which is confusing to the world and to the people of the United Methodist Church."

A flurry of additional pro-ho-

mosexual measures were introduced during the conference, including: adding a statement of nondiscrimination over sexual orientation and gender identity in the church; adding language to allow homosexual marriages or civil unions; and deleting the phrase "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness" from qualifications for church office.

Those measures were defeated.

And delegates voted to pass several measures affirming the UMC's objection to homosexuality, including: adding "performing same-sex wedding ceremonies" as a chargeable offense for clergy; and preventing the expenditure of annual conference funds to promote acceptance of homosexuality.



Native drummers perform at the conference.

Jamie Dean is the editor of EP News.

Sexuality

Male and female he created them: a historical look at celibacy

Remkes Kooistra

The creation of procreation

The first chapter of the first book of the Bible ends with the creation of the human race.

Genesis 1:27 (NIV) reads:

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

The most important feature of the creation of the human race is the differentiation between the sexes: male and female. Like day and night, sea and land, sun and moon, summer and winter, male and female belong together, inseparably linked in the creation order, which is God's order. This basic feature will serve the Creator, the Father of all that lives, in the unfolding of all that he created.

God was pleased with his work and blessed man and woman saying, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." (Genesis 1: 28)

It is obvious that in the Genesis account procreation is an essential aspect of the creation. Celibacy has no place in God's world. Celibacy is actually *contra naturam* (contrary to nature).

We all observe this, share this, and are part of it. When spring comes, birds build nests for the coming generation. Seeds burst and green sprouts are to be seen. The entire world of plants and animals becomes alive and active with a frenetic, almost feverish energy.

Life bursts the seams of winter. There can be no more delays. Every animal looks for a partner. Some animals, such as stags, are copulating themselves to death in the celebration of fertility, in the unyielding demands of nature, of their nature. Spring is the time of re-awakening life and of returning love. Such are the iron laws of God's creation.

All living creatures have to play their part in this process. The death of the individual serves the survival of the species.

Even monks and nuns feel uncomfortable in their bodies and habits. Those who thought they had killed the desires of their flesh and blood suddenly wonder whether this is really what God wants. The whole world is driven by the urge compelling procreation.

Life, its preservation and extension, becomes an unsatisfiable urge. Life must be lived. IT IS SPRING. The words of the Song of Songs become very real:

for love is as strong as death,
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire,
like a mighty flame. (8:6, 7)

A new evaluation of celibacy

Recently there has been much discussion amongst Christians on the subject of homosexuality, enhanced by the matter of same-sex marriages. These discussions have placed a new emphasis on the option of celibacy.

In the Old Testament as in much of the ancient world there is very little appreciation of celibacy. The only exception seems to be the story of Jephthah's daughter. Yet, she wept with her friends for two months because, as she said, "I will never marry" (Judges 11:29:40).

All this, however, changes in the New Testament. As the Gospel reached the Hellenistic world, its confrontation with the platonic philosophy became unavoidable. There was in Plato's world very little appreciation for the human body.



'Adam and Eve' engraving by Albrecht Dürer c. 1504

The body and its functions belonged to the sphere of the earth, of physical things.

The time of the physical heroes, the perfect bodies, was gone. Greek civilization had changed. Man became a spiritual being, with a divine wisdom.

The changing culture influenced also the development of the expanding Christian religion. Celibacy became a desirable option.

Nowhere in the Scriptures does celibacy get more attention and appreciation than in 1 Corinthians 7.

Paul, answering a number of questions regarding marriage sent to him from the Corinthian church, begins by saying: "It is good for a man not to marry" (verse 1). The introductory words "it is good" are repeated in verse 8: "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am." And these words are repeated once more in verse 26 where Paul writes: "Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are."

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul writes: "It is good for a man not to marry. But..." The apostle uses the Greek word *kalon*, which is a keyword in this chapter. It does not mean "morally good or mandatory" (for then it would contradict Genesis 2:18), but, as Grosheide remarks, "*kalon* is, according to Paul, to be able not to use a certain *éouxia*"¹ *Kalon* means simply: "it is a good thing."

We could therefore paraphrase the first verses of chapter 7 in this way:

It may be a good idea for a man in certain situations and under certain conditions not to have sexual relations with a woman – that means to live the celibate life – but the question remains whether he will be able to do this. Therefore, since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and that holds for the other partner as well: each woman should have her own husband.²

Paul acknowledges throughout this chapter that in Christ there is no male or female, for all are one; as members of Christ, we are all equal (cf. Galatians 3:28). We all face temptations, and we all live in a sinful world in which there is "so much immorality."

Of course, to Paul, this is not the only or even the main reason why he accepts marriage and, in marriage, sexual relations between the partners. But there were changes in the sexual ethics of this new generation of Christians. Some members of the Corinthian congregation had experienced sexual abstinence as a spiritual high and as a foretaste of the life of the future, but among them there were also those who had fallen down from their high plateau and embraced different forms of porneia, sexual immorality as Paul describes in chapter 6 of his first letter to the Corinthians.

Thus Paul writes that marriage with sex is the normal code and usually the best thing for all believers. There are exceptions, as Jesus and Paul were, but they remain exceptions. Sometimes the demands of God's kingdom sublimate sexual desires and needs.

F. F. Bruce writes: "Far from being the discourager of marriage that he is popularly supposed to be, Paul might with some justice be called, as in the title of J. M. Ford's article, 'St. Paul, the Philogamist'.³

Somewhat earlier, Bruce suggests that Origen was probably right by suggesting that the phrase "it is good for a man not to marry" should be placed between quotation marks since the words are most likely a quote from the epistle the Corinthians sent to Paul, not from Paul's answer to them.⁴ If we would consider these words to be Paul's own judgment, the phrase seems to contradict Paul's warning words from 1 Timothy 4:3-4, where he wrote that in later times "hypocritical liars" will "forbid people to marry." The comment in the NIV reads: "Paul refutes this idea [celibacy] by stating that sexual relations have their proper expression in marriage."

Still Paul writes later in this same chapter: "I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God" (1 Corinthians 7:7). Here it becomes clear that Paul accepted celibacy as a "gift from God" given to some, but not to all.

I wholeheartedly agree with Paul K. Jewett as he writes, referring to Matthew 19:12 and 1 Corinthians. 7:⁵

The option of celibacy... is also authenticated as a genuine Christian calling by the very structure of biblical revelation. Not that celibacy is the ideal to which we strive in order to suppress our sexual impulses as sinful. But celibacy has become a truly Christian option because the eschatological form of the kingdom in which "one neither marries nor is given in marriage" has been made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ.⁶

Hence, Jewett adds the warning: "Protestants should not let their traditional polemic against clerical celibacy distort their perception at this point."⁷

There was also a time in my life, during my first years in seminary, that I seriously considered whether celibacy would not be my best option. Was not Christ calling me to devote myself to fulltime work in God's kingdom? Not long after, I discovered that I did more and better work in a social environment.

It seems that the apostle, even though he does not reject marriage "as if our sexuality would belong to the sphere of our sinful nature,"⁸ feels that much can be said in favor of celibacy. (See 1 Corinthians 7:32.)

Regardless of whether the phrase "It is good for a man not to marry" were written or quoted by Paul, it remains a fact that these words and the entire chapter in the history of

Sexuality/Lifestyles

the church have often been understood in the sense of advocating celibacy as a mode of living preferable to marriage. Marriage was for those who were weak and could not control the sexual desires of their bodies. Celibacy was living in anticipation of what was considered to be the future life in heaven in which people would "neither marry nor be given in marriage" (Matthew 22:30).⁷

Augustine (354-430 A. D.), influenced by the neo-platonic philosophy of Plotinus, writes about the "weaker brethren who enjoy married life" in contrast with those "who live at a higher level, who are not entangled in the mesh of a married life." And St. Jerome (345-420 A. D.) went even further, demanding: "Cut down the wood of marriage with the axe of virginity."⁸

John Calvin, who respected Jerome as a "famous man... endowed with outstanding virtues," also finds that Jerome nevertheless "was handicapped by one serious defect, for in debate he was swept off his feet by excessive zeal.... Thus his inference here is as follows: 'It is good not to touch a woman, therefore it is wrong to touch her.'"⁹

The idea that marriage has to do with our sinful flesh and has to be sanctified by procreation, since sex and original sin are related, has persisted for centuries, even in the churches of the Reformation. Such suspicion of marriage is clear in the requirement defended by some church authorities for newlyweds "to abstain ... on their wedding night."¹⁰



Albrecht Dürer

Peasant Couple Dancing

Jewett is right by writing: "The ancient Fathers ... bequeathed to the church a deep suspicion of sex as especially compromised by the taint of original sin."¹¹ Even though marriage "eventually" became a sacrament, the unmarried state was commended to the priesthood and became mandatory during the fifth century in the Middle Ages.

Lifestyles of the not quite rich & less than famous

When you're married to someone like Jack, you never know what adventures a weekend will bring. Just because we're farmers doesn't mean we don't get around. A few weeks ago we spent Saturday wandering through acres of black leather, milling about at the International Bike Show in Toronto. More interesting than the custom paint jobs and collector bikes were the people we were rubbing shoulders with.

This past winter Jack acquired a vintage Norton 750 Commando. Norton is a British racing bike that went out of production in the 70's. We discovered that Jack isn't the only one crazy enough to treasure a 30 year-old motorbike. As a matter of fact, Ontario Norton Owners have organized themselves into a small, but elite group known as (what else?) – Ontario Norton Owners. Apparently ONOs get together on a regular basis for bike rides and camp-outs and to trade Norton stories. Their president is a man named, I kid you not, Will Norton. He seemed a jovial sort, although he did mention divorcing the first Mrs. Norton because she refused to embrace the faith.

Speaking of faith, we also met three very visible groups of Christian bikers. They too have organized themselves accordingly and enjoy each other's company at pancake breakfasts and summer tours. To be clear, these are not ex-gang members who "found God," but ordinary Christians who also happen to love motorbikes.

Many of the people in the crowd looked like us – middle-aged hobbyists out to browse biker stuff on a spring day. There was an entire section where the Harley people hung out, another for Gold Wing enthusiasts, and then there were the classic biker-types. You know, the ones that come to mind when you hear the word "biker" – scruffy beards, dusty bandanas, and physiques that make it hard for them to see their own shoes. Their women were equally charming, tastefully bedecked in jewelry made from spare engine parts, tattoos proudly flaunted on their bulging arms. I tried not to stare. They didn't look as friendly as the ONOs or the Christian bikers.

To round out a perfect day, Jack and I stopped at Harvey's on our way home for a couple of really fine cheeseburger combos. Ah, the good life.

This past weekend Jack's alter-ego emerged. He announced at breakfast Saturday that we should use the gift certificate given to us on our 25th anniversary for a meal at a posh restaurant in Elora. Our main concern was how we'd be able to consume \$100 worth of food in a single meal. I checked the website for a dress code, and noted the prices were conspicuously absent from the menu posted there.

We donned our Sunday best and headed out to see how the other half lives. The fact that there was no Drive-Thru window should have set off alarm bells. The

Calvin commented on mandatory celibacy for the priesthood when he wrote (and he had observed the situation for many years):

"... marriage did not seem to be a way of life in keeping with the holiness of their order. God punished the presumption of those who despised marriage and made rash vows of everlasting continency, first by the secret fires of lust, and then with horrible and filthy practices.... It was not enough that those, in whose case it was a capital offence to have a wife, maintained mistresses, otherwise prostitutes, with impunity, no home was safe because of the lustfulness of the priests."¹²

In his commentary on verse 28 of 1 Corinthians 7,

Intangible Things

Heidi VanDerSlikke

maitre d', a small, bespectacled man, shook our hands and introduced himself as Franklin. Pulling out my chair he referred to me as, "The lovely lady," as if I weren't present, then proceeded to personally tuck the dinner napkin onto my lap. At this point I could see Jack considering whether he should deck the guy.

Oblivious to Jack's glare, Franklin offered us a choice between three different types of water. Jack replied in a clear and distinct voice, (the one he uses on telemarketers), "I don't want any water." This response seemed to surprise Franklin, who adjusted his natty little bowtie and rattled off the dinner wine specials.

Our server, Sarah, was less intimidating than Franklin. We ordered appetizers that were priced higher than a full meal at the Swiss Chalet, and for an entrée, chateaubriand for two. The table displayed more silverware than Jack has tools on his workbench. While he sized up "all them eatin' irons," I amused myself by observing our fellow diners.

The room was full of men in suits and elegantly dressed women. At the next table two women leaned close together, engaged in quiet conversation, spearing food from each other's plates. In a nearby corner Franklin seated a husband and wife, along with their two teenage daughters who made it abundantly clear by their body language that they would rather have been anywhere else. Across from us sat a young couple and two angelic little girls who nibbled politely on their breadsticks.

Sarah wheeled a cart with our dinner on it up to the table. Then she set the meat on fire. I could see Jack thinking he should have taken Franklin up on that water. When the flames extinguished, she carved the tiny roast with all the precision of a neurosurgeon and artistically arranged our dinners on platters. Dessert arrived looking more like decoration than food, but it was delicious. By the time dinner was over we were too full to jump up in alarm when the bill was presented. That single dinner cost more than we usually spend for a week's groceries.

Living on a farm in rural Ontario it would be easy to think all the world is made up of quiet country folk. Thanks to Jack I won't slip into that rut. Whether we're scarfing burgers with the rough and tumble types, or dining on haute cuisine with a more cultured crowd, there's never a dull moment. Wonder what he has in mind this weekend.

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Calvin remarks: "There is no shadow of doubt that Paul meant to extend the freedom to marry to everybody."¹³

Even though many priests during the twentieth century have left the priesthood in order to live a married life, and though the Orthodox Catholic Church acknowledges married priests, the Roman Catholic Church has maintained its position up till today, regardless of occasional fierce opposition.

Finally, I would like to add some remarks about Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:9: "It is better to marry than to burn with passion." The Greek text is less specific. It reads in the original: "It is better to marry than to burn." Some

See *Celibacy* page 17...

Reminiscences

Me and Grandpa and the Malibu for a loonie

Stephen Van Helden

It was really through a number of events that in the fall of 1992 I ended up with my late Grandpa Bax's 1983 four door Chevy Malibu.

The first was buying a 1984 blue Honda Civic. As a journalism student at Loyalist College in Belleville, Ont. I needed transportation to become a working student reporter. There were stories to cover, and if I wanted to become a true journalist, the city bus and hitching rides from friends would no longer cut it.

To me it was a gem: \$1700.00 for a four door Honda Civic. I read the ad in the trusty old *Chatham Daily News* classified section and decided to call.

"Oh yea, great car," said the man on the other end of the line. "A great deal too!"

After consulting with my father, we decided to meet the man and check out the car.

Excited as a kid in a candy store, I took it for a spin with my Dad, and everything seemed great. The Honda drove smoothly, no odd sounds or noises, and it was comfortable too. An inflated sense of self-importance arose in me. I imagined cruising around the winding streets of Belleville and the tree-lined campus grounds. I imagined weekends when I would go to Kingston, Ottawa or visit friends at Redeemer College. Surely this car would impress the girls!

After a final inspection and approval of the vehicle by an auto mechanic, I went to my bank and had a draft made up for \$1700.00.

Little did I know that this small transaction was the beginning of a number of very significant events. The tiny man in his late 30's with short black hair shook my hand sincerely and assured me this car would not disappoint me. I had purchased my first vehicle!

I drove off and all around the streets of Chatham: King, Richmond, Tweedsmuir and Mercer "Ahhh, this is the ticket!" I told myself, my hands on the big black steering wheel as if competing in the Indy 500. To celebrate my purchase, I stopped in at the famous Weirsma's bakery and ate some of the finest Dutch sweets in Chatham, if not in southwestern Ontario.

No longer was I a mere passenger on the way to a church hockey game or envious of my friends who did have cars. Borrowing my parent's car occasionally was okay, but, I said to myself, this is true freedom.

My Grandpa Bax congratulated me on my new purchase: "Good for you Stevie!"



Come visit me when you are home."

Cruising

After driving around for endless hours those first few days and realizing that gas indeed did cost money – and quite a lot of it – I settled into a routine once again. Finishing off my last days at the factory, my thoughts turned to those splendid fall days and the start of another school year where the possibilities were endless and the air ripe with newness.

This time, it would be with my first car! I patted her on the hood like a trusty old friend.

My Blue Honda Civic was sparkling. I had packed my last box, and the trunk was filled with clothes, books, pens, paper, cassettes, and of course my coveted ghetto-blaster, as we called it then. There was something to be said for being able to fit one's life possessions into a modest car. I turned the key and it started like a charm. Indeed, the man who sold me the car had told the truth: it was a great car.

As I smoothly pulled the blue Honda Civic out of the driveway, My parents looked on and waved. It was a wave that said we will miss you but it will also be nice to have some food in the cupboards.

This was the life – a full tank of gas, a full pack of cigarettes and the open road ahead. The Blues Brothers would have been jealous.

But the 401 that would be a real test of what this car could do. It was one thing to cruise around the quiet streets of Chatham and quite another to negotiate the cement jungle of Toronto with its endless barrage of signs, interchanges and collector lanes.

As traffic became heavier near Mississauga and flashy corvettes and BMW's passed me on both the left and right, I reached for another cigarette. Sweat poured from my forehead like a drippy faucet.

But when the madness of the 401

though Toronto was behind me I breathed easier. Belleville was less than two hours away and my mind again turned to the excitement of a new school year.

Rounding the bend

A month or so later, school was in full swing, my blue Honda was humming and life was good. There was no more relying on the city bus to cart me around town. I was the master of my universe, the king of my domain. Classes were in full swing and my 84 Blue Honda was a staple of consistency – or so I thought.

One morning around 9:00 a.m. on the way to my morning classes, I rounded the bend as I had done so many times. I was eyeing the road that would lead me over the large bridge with a magnificent view of the Bay of Quinte. All of sudden, THUNKKKK!! THHHHUUNKKK!!!!

In an instant, one side of the car collapsed and I was out of control. I hit the brakes and tried to avoid the ditch to my right. To no avail, the tires caught the loose gravel and me and my blue Honda spun helplessly into the ditch.

A cloud of dust almost smothered me. I clambered out, I brushed myself off. Huge plumes of smoke billowed from beneath the hood like a smokey barbecue. I looked at my beloved Honda in disbelief: a strut had let loose and was jutting up a couple feet above the engine with the dented hood resting on it.

In a matter of moments, my humming Honda, my road to independence, was crumpled like a paper coffee cup. Out of my mouth came a few choice words I would hardly be proud to repeat. At least I was okay, although my pride took a beating.

Little did I know that over 500 kms away my grandpa was enjoying some of his last rides in his 1983 Chevy Malibu. Soon he would decide, perhaps with the urging of some concerned children, that

his driving days were over. He would not go back for the yearly driving test mandatory for Canadians over 85.

Cheated

Back in Belleville, I once again was resigned to busses and mooching. Weekend dates were canceled and a moment of silence was held for my dear old Blue Honda at Loyalist College. My housemate Dirk was so kind as to offer his car to help me out.

Further investigating revealed that I had bought a lemon, disguised as the real deal. The ministry of transportation came by and confirmed that the car had been tampered with before I bought it. Somebody had illegally fibre-glassed a damaged part of the structure and painted over it. I took some pictures of the damage, just in case.

Later I learned that the small man with the convincing smile had purchased the car for parts in London. This man was in cahoots with the mechanic who passed the inspection. Eventually I got my money back.

My 84 Honda civic ended up in a heap with thousands of other cars that were too badly damaged to fix or deemed as junk by the owner. A man with large greasy hands handed me \$65.00 for the useless car and a look that said, "Sorry about your luck kid, but it happens all the time."

One car, one loonie

When my mother called and told me my grandfather was not going back for his licence and wanted to give me his car, I was a little overwhelmed. Maybe I even felt a tinge of guilt. After all, he could easily sell the car and perhaps treat himself and Grandma to something special. Grandpa was hardly a materialistic man; he was the embodiment of simple living and seldom complained. While some find their worth in the size of a stock portfolio, Grandpa found it in people. Grandpa loved being around people.

On a brilliant sunny October day, Grandpa handed over his keys to his 1983 Chevy Malibu. A loonie it officially cost me, to ensure the transaction was legal. With one hand, he gave me the keys. With the other, his big strong hand gripped mine and said, "Enjoy it Stevie, it will be a great car for you."

Grandpa was right. It wasn't the fastest car or the fanciest. It was basic: an AM radio, four doors and a big old V-6 engine. The odd time I did have to bring it in for maintenance, mechanics loved it. There was lots of room under the hood to manoeuvre and fix whatever ailed it; no fancy computer diagnostics were needed to figure out the problem.

Over the years, the 1983 Malibu brought me many experiences. In the

Reminiscences / Meditation

summer of 1995 on a bright sunny afternoon, my friend Rod and I were returning to my house after some pick-up basketball. On the way the brakes became less and less responsive. Rod and I agreed that it would be best to get the car towed after we arrived at my house. As we pulled into the driveway, however, the brakes didn't respond at all.

We weren't going very fast but the car just didn't want to slow down even though there was a small incline. We were helpless as the car headed towards the fence beside the house.

"We're going through!" Rod yelled.

I groped for the emergency brake but was having trouble. It was only a tiny lever located near the floor. The afternoon silence in suburbia was shattered by the sound of wood shattering into small pieces.

Still the Malibu did not stop. The pool was only meters away and my life flashed before my eyes: there would be no way to explain this one to Dad! Reaching over, Rod quickly reefed the large manual gearshift from forward into neutral, stopping the car only a few feet from the pool.

After a moment of catching our breath, we looked at each other and did the only thing there was left to do – laugh for a good 15 minutes. Everyone found it rather amazing that, while the fence was demolished, the old Malibu was hardly scratched.

Rod enjoyed re-hashing this episode at my wedding a few years later. In fact, without this legendary car, there may have been no wedding. After all, this was the car in which I picked up Holly, my wife, on my first date.

Driving Grandpa

But when I think of my Chevy Malibu mostly I remember Grandpa. On summer days I picked him up at the nursing home and we would go to breakfast at Zellers. I discovered how good breakfast was there – and that Grandpa was a regular.

The waitress even knew him by name: "Good morning Jack, good to see you again."

He replied with a big smile and a friendly tap of his cane on her behind.

Grandpa would do most of the talking and I would listen. He would tell me stories of him and Grandma who had

been married for over 65 years.

"Talk things out, communicate," he'd say. "The Lord is good, Stevie. Sometimes life is hard and it's not fair. It isn't always easy, but trust in him."

Dr. Phil could have learned a thing or two from Grandpa.

After breakfast, Grandpa and I would drive around the outskirts of Chatham, past farms teeming with various vegetables, including corn, cucumbers and red peppers. He would tell me stories about particular farms he had worked when he first immigrated to Canada.

"Mr Jacobs was a great man to work for," he recounted. "Those were long days, but God provided me with a good job." Or he would comment on the lazy guy that worked beside him. Or he'd recall how much he missed Grandma in those early years, for she had to wait behind in Holland until he established himself in Canada.

As I learned more of his life, his trials and successes, Grandpa came to mean more to me. He became much more than the nice man with grey hair who gave me extra peppermints in church when mom and dad were not looking. Grandpa and I became friends.

Grandpa recounted days he and Grandma ventured to Rondeau Provincial Park and enjoyed a cool beverage under a big tree old maple with a nice summer breeze whipping off Lake Erie. I was surprised to learn their beverage of choice was a nice cold beer! They didn't need a fancy hotel room in the Caribbean to be content. In their later years, Grandpa and Grandma mainly drove to church and back with a few small trips in between. This included going over to the Dutch store to pick up some Gouda and peppermints. After Grandma died, our breakfast outings became more frequent and our friendship even stronger.

To be sure, Grandpa did miss driving. After all, it is in many ways one's last form of independence. In the end, though, it put a sparkle in his eyes to know that I was enjoying the car. I think it was more than coincidence that my Honda was a lemon, and I ended up with my Grandpa's Malibu. If you are like me, maybe you too have trouble seeing the bigger picture at times and who is really in control.

A conversion is incomplete if it does not leave Jesus Christ in the central place in one's life. The shortest possible description of a Christian — a description with which the New Testament would fully agree — is that a Christian is a person who can say: "For me Jesus Christ is Lord." Herbert Butterfield's words about facing the future are good: "Hold to Christ, and for the rest be totally uncommitted." Any alleged conversion which does not leave one totally committed solely to Jesus Christ is incomplete and imperfect....

William Barclay, *In the Hands of God*

Reflection on the hymn in Colossians 1

Christ is Lord of cosmos and of history

Pope John Paul II

The marvelous Christological hymn of the Letter to the Colossians, many scholars believe, might be the quotation of a song of the Churches of Asia Minor, included by Paul in the letter addressed to the Christian community of Colossae, a city that was then flourishing and populous.



The apostle, however, never went to this center of Phrygia, a region of present-day Turkey. The local Church was founded by Epaphras, one of his disciples, a native of those lands. He appears at the end of the letter together with the evangelist Luke, "the beloved physician," as St. Paul calls him (4:14), and with another figure, Mark, the "cousin of Barnabas" (4:10), perhaps the same companion of Barnabas and Paul (see Acts 12:25; 13:5,13), who later became an evangelist.

As we will have occasion in the future to return to this canticle, we will limit ourselves now to an overall glance at it and to evoke a spiritual commentary, written by a famous Father of the Church, St. John Chrysostom (fourth century), noted orator and bishop of Constantinople. In the hymn, the grandiose figure of Christ emerges, Lord of the cosmos. Like the divine creative Wisdom exalted by the Old Testament (see, for example, Proverbs 8:22-31), "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"; in fact, "all things were created through him and for him" (Col. 1:16-17).

Therefore, a transcendent plan unfolds in the universe which reveals that God acts through the work of his Son. This is also proclaimed in the prologue of John's Gospel, when he states that "All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be" (John 1:3). Also matter with its energy, life and light bear the imprint of the Word of God, "his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). The revelation of the New Testament casts a new light on the words of the wise man of the Old Testament, who said that "from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen" (Wisdom 13:5).

The hymn of the Letter to the Colossians presents another function of Christ: He is also the Lord of the history of salvation, which is manifested in the Church (Col. 1:18) and is accomplished by the "blood of his cross" (v 20), source of peace and harmony for all human history.

Therefore, not only the horizon that is external to our existence is marked by the efficacious presence of Christ, but

also the more specific reality of the human creature, namely, history. The latter is not at the mercy of blind and irrational forces; instead, despite sin and evil, it is ruled and oriented – by the work of Christ – toward fullness. Through the cross of Christ, the whole of reality is "reconciled" with the Father.

The hymn paints, in this way, a wonderful picture of the universe and of history, inviting us to trust. We are not a useless speck of dust, lost in space and time without meaning, but we are part of a wise plan that stems from the love of the Father.

As announced, we now give the word to St. John Chrysostom, so that he will be the one who crowns this reflection. In his Commentary on the Letter to the Colossians he reflects at length on this canticle. At the beginning he underlines the gratuitousness of the gift of God "who has made it possible for us to participate in the destiny of the saints in light" (v 12). "Why does he call it 'destiny'?" Chrysostom asks, and he answers: "To show that no one can obtain the Kingdom with his own works. Also here, as in the majority of cases, 'destiny' has the sense of 'fortune.' No one can have a behavior that is able to merit the Kingdom, but everything is gift of the Lord. This is why he says: 'When you have done everything, say: We are useless servants. We have done what we should do'" (Greek Patrology 62,312).

This benevolent and powerful gratuitousness re-emerges further on, when we read that all things were created through Christ (Col. 1:16). "From him depends the substance of all things," the bishop explains. "Not only does he make them pass from non-being to being, but it is also he who sustains them, so that if they were removed from his providence, they would perish and dissolve.... They depend on him: in fact, it suffices for them only to incline toward him for him to sustain and reinforce them" (Greek Patrology 62,319).

And an even greater sign of gratuitous love is all that Christ has done for the Church, of which he is the head. In this connection (v 18), Chrysostom explains, "after having spoken of the dignity of Christ, the Apostle also speaks of his love for men: 'He is the head of his body, which is the Church,' wishing to show his intimate communion with us. He, in fact, who is so far above and superior to all, united himself to those who are below" (Greek Patrology 62,320).

[Translation by ZENIT of John Paul II's address at May 5, 2004 general audience]

Theology

Who can be saved? A new slant on an old debate

Neal Punt

"We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him" (C. S. Lewis, Book II, 5, p. 65).

Who can be saved? By Prof. Terrance L. Tiessen (InterVarsity Press, March 2004) is "...a book that will become a reference point for all further work in the field" (John G. Stackhouse Jr., Regent College).

In his book *Who Can Be Saved?* Tiessen heads in the direction suggested by the great mind and heart of C.S. Lewis. It is eminently worthwhile to carefully consider what Tiessen finds on his theological journey.

Tiessen traces the history of exclusivism (his more accurate term is "accessibilism") back to the second century. He provides convincing biblical evidence for the following truths among others: all persons are sinners; no one can be saved except through Christ; there is an urgent need for missionary endeavor; no one is condemned apart from personal, willful, and final indifference to or rejection of whatever revelation God has given of himself to that particular individual; salvation is possible without a New Testament knowledge of Jesus Christ; at the moment of physical death each person's eternal destiny is already determined.

Tiessen also furnishes an amazingly detailed biblical basis for dialogue with other religions while fully maintaining the exclusivism of Christianity. Such dialogue is required of evangelical Christians by our increasingly smaller world.

Serious students of "the plan of salvation" will find Tiessen's book to be indispensable. They owe it to themselves to examine this well-written scholarly 500-page work with their Bibles open.

No evangelical theologian has come as close as Tiessen has to what I have been attempting to say for many years. Both of us begin our journey with the teachings of the early church fathers. By examining their teachings in the light of the Scriptures we both reach the conclusions listed above. On one section of the trail we take divergent paths. He calls the path he takes "accessibilism." I call the route I take "biblical universalism."



John Calvin

Jacobus Arminius

The unique characteristic of accessibilism is: "God's saving grace is universally sufficient so that, on at least one occasion in each person's life, one is enabled to respond to God's self-revelation with a faith response that is acceptable to God as a means of justification" (p. 25). To appreciate the extremely significant nuances that flow from this claim one must read Tiessen's book.

The essence of "biblical universalism" is: "We must accept the so-called 'universalistic' texts as written. We may allow only those exceptions that are necessarily imposed upon these passages from the broader context of the Scriptures as whole." To understand that the same good and necessary implications stem from this claim one should read *Unconditional Good News* (Eerdmans, 1980) or its brief summary *So Also In Christ* (Northland Books, 2002).

Although "accessibilism" and "biblical universalism" are largely compatible, in this paper we look at the divergent section of the paths taken. There is a basic difference in our understanding of how God's grace becomes effective in the life of sinners. Below I point to the most important impediments I see on the pathway of "accessibilism." Undoubtedly Tiessen sees stumbling blocks on the route taken by "biblical universalism."

Faith and repentance have an essential role to play in the existential experience or application salvation, according to accessibilism. They are so indispensable that there is no existential application of salvation apart from a personal faith and repentance exer-

cised by the person who is brought to salvation.

This essential relationship is so intimate that accessibilism draws these conclusions:

1) Saving grace must be universally sufficient and efficient (but not necessarily effective) so that every person, on at least one occasion during their life-time on earth, is enabled to respond affirmatively to the self-revelation God has given to that particular person.

This is true for those who die in infancy, the mentally challenged, those who may be saved without a New Testament knowledge of Jesus Christ as well as for those who are saved through hearing the Word preached.

2) This union of faith and repentance with the application of salvation is so essential, according to accessibilism, that God must and in fact does reveal himself to every person (including infants and those mentally challenged) in a way that is compatible with the varied circumstances found in the totality of that person's life experience. God uniquely determines the amount and kind of self-revelation given to each person, to which they must respond positively, in order to be saved. The effective power of the Holy Spirit to respond in a way that is pleasing to God is given only to the elect.

By reason of physical and other constraints we cannot meaningfully communicate with infants in the womb, other very young infants, some mentally challenged people and with people living in countries where the gospel has never gone. From this fact we may not conclude that God is also so limited. Tiessen mentions the way

the babe in Elizabeth's womb responded to the greeting of Mary (Luke 1:41). Tiessen, himself a former missionary, also speaks of the experience of missionaries. They report that when the gospel is proclaimed many respond to the good news by saying that this is the kind of hope and God (or religion) they have been in search of for many years.

Tiessen notes that it has always been the teaching of the church that salvation comes by grace through faith. The Bible explicitly says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). Tiessen correctly stresses that the urgency and necessity of faith cannot be over-emphasized.

The theological benefit that flows from accessibilism, according to Tiessen, is that this universally sufficient enabling grace vindicates God's judgment of eternal death imposed upon those who reject or remain indifferent to this enabling grace. Traditional Calvinism carries the burden of teaching that the non-elect are never given a grace that enables them to believe.

Arminianism teaches that all persons are provided with a potential salvation that can be existentially realized by all who choose to believe. This implies that the saved individual has some reason to boast. Accessibilism acknowledges that this universal, sufficient, enabling grace is sovereignly made effective by the power of the Holy Spirit only in the lives of God's elect. Therefore for the redeemed all boasting is excluded.

I see the following impediments to Tiessen's "accessibilism":

1) The notion that there is in accessibilism a "universally suffi-

cient, enabling, grace [that] vindicates God's judgment of eternal death imposed upon those who reject or remain indifferent to this enabling grace" is not very convincing. There is no bar or court of justice before which God is compelled to stand in order to be vindicated. God is "self-vindicating." Anything God does is right, true and holy for no other reason than that God does it. God is not answerable to anything outside of himself.

2) Nineveh had "more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who [could not] tell their right hand from their left." This undoubtedly means that those persons did not have the most elementary capability of knowing the simplest things in order to make a judgment (right or left hand) based upon their knowledge. By extrapolation there are many millions of people today, most of whom are young infants including those still in their mother's womb, who cannot "tell their right hand from their left." If these persons are incapable of telling "their right hand from their left," it seems most unlikely that the Scriptures intend to teach that all such individuals, who die while still in their immature ignorance, know about and are accountable for making a critical decision. A decision that determines their eternal weal or woe depending on how they respond to whatever measure of self-revelation God has given them.

3) With accessibilism's strict adherence to the dictum that there can be no existential application of salvation to any person apart from exercised faith and repentance we must also add the condition of such individuals doing works "worthy of repentance." "For you see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." Such faith cannot save anyone.

4) Faith and repentance are human acts. Even though they are engendered and directed by the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people they involve human participation. No matter how tenuous this human element is, it is imperfect and stained with sin. Nothing that is imperfect and stained with sin can be essential to effectively apply Christ's saving work to his people.

Reformed theology has recognized that faith and repentance are

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the fruit of salvation. They are not prerequisites or conditions to bring sinners into the existential experience of salvation. Martin Luther observed that we have no more to do with our rebirth than we had to do with our physical birth. Lutheran theologians have noted that by the time a person is inwardly or subjectively changed to such a degree as to be able to accept grace, he or she is no longer the old, natural man who regards the Gospel as foolishness, but a new man, completely transformed within, who has learned to regard the Gospel as the wisdom of God.

That salvation is exclusively God's work completed for us in Christ, and is not dependent on some human act to effectively establish us in the state of grace, is seen in the analogy between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made [Greek: "constituted"] sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus Christ] the many will be made [Greek: "constituted"] righteous" Vs. 19. No further human act was necessary to make Adam's sin the sin of those he represented, so also no further human act is necessary to make the righteousness of Christ the righteousness of those who were represented by him.

Faith is a matter of trusting the good news of God's Word regarding our already established new standing in Christ. This "new standing" was determined apart from any faith, act, or attitude of ours. It was established by the one "who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago" (2 Tim. 1:9).

The terms "faith" and "grace" are synonymous in regard to the role they play in bringing sinners to the existential fulfillment of salvation. "Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring" (Romans 4:16). To be saved or "justified by faith" is to be "justified by grace." "There is no difference," everyone who is justified is "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

The frequent and urgent calls to faith found throughout the Bible should not lead us to conclude that



Paul preaching in Athens

there must be an essential relationship between faith and the existential experience of salvation. There is a subtle but nevertheless very real hazard in drawing such a conclusion. In the very nature of the case all the demands to believe, repent and to walk in joyful obedience to God's will, come only to accountable persons to whom the message of the Bible has been meaningfully communicated.

These demands are not imposed on this clearly defined segment of humanity in order that through these acts God's saving work may be actualized in their lives. Faith, repentance and obedience are absolutely required of all accountable persons to whom the good news of salvation has been made known. This is so, however, because for such persons to neglect or remain indifferent to these demands would be for them a willful, deliberate and damnable rebellion against the will of God as it has been made known to them.

From what is said in the preceding paragraph we draw two conclusions: 1) There is no positive role that the imperfect and tainted acts of faith, repentance and obedience must fulfill in order to make actual the sinner's salva-

tion. 2) Faith and repentance are not essential for the salvation of infants who die in infancy and those who are mentally challenged throughout their lifetime on earth.

The problem that accessibility attempts to solve results from the fact that ever since the second century mainstream theologians have understood the message to be that: "All persons will be lost except those whom the Bible declares will be saved." With this perspective we expect the Scriptures to describe those who will be saved and how they become so.

Such a scenario is not found in the Bible. Consequently innumerable proposals have been advocated to account for the way in which those who are totally corrupted by sin can come to an actual, existential, experience of salvation. Among these proposals are variants of such schemes as: Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, salvation only within the established church, traces of original goodness that remain in every sinner; a seed of faith implanted in every sinner's heart, an enabling grace that attends the word preached, Religious Instrumentalism, God's foreseeing those who are described in our peripheral vision (the broader context of the Scriptures) that reveals that certain persons will be finally lost.

Relativism, God selects a limited number of persons to whom he sovereignly gives salvation, Hypothetical Universalism, etc.

To these proposals Tiessen adds Accessibility.

Biblical Universalism recognizes, on the basis of the so-called "universalistic texts," that the message of Scripture is: "All persons will be saved except those who the Bible declares will be finally lost." With this scenario it is not surprising that there is no scripturally provided schematic that accounts for the salvation of some.

It is indisputable that the so-called "universalistic" texts speak of a "certain to be realized" salvation in terms of "all persons." When interpreting these passages we must necessarily view them with both our focused and peripheral vision. To do less is to distort what these texts say.

With our focused vision we see that these texts, within and including their immediate context clearly say, "All persons will be saved." When so viewing them we are cognizant of the exceptions that are described in our peripheral vision (the broader context of the Scriptures) that reveals that certain persons will be finally lost.

Those, the reprobate, are described in no other way in the Scriptures than those who willfully, persistently and finally reject or remain indifferent to whatever revelation God has given of himself to them.

To view any passage of the Bible without using both our focused and our peripheral vision necessarily results in error. Paul says, "Everything is permissible for me" (1 Cor. 6:12). If we view this text with our focused vision exclusively (seeing nothing but the text and its immediate context) we would have to conclude that murder and adultery were permissible for Paul.

By using both our focused and peripheral vision when interpreting the so-called "universalistic" texts, we can agree with these words of Dr. John Murray:

"The one ground upon which the imputation of the righteousness of Christ becomes ours is the union with Christ. In other words the justified person is constituted righteous by the obedience of Christ because of the solidarity established between Christ and the justified person. The solidarity constitutes the bond by which the righteousness of Christ becomes that of the believer. Once the solidarity is posited there is no other mediating factor that could be conceived as necessary to the conjunction of the righteousness of Christ and the righteousness of the believer" (p. 70, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*; emphasis added).

Not even "faith" can be conceived as necessary to the conjunction of the righteousness of Christ and the righteousness of the believer." Faith is the fruit of an already established union with Christ.

In this essay we focused on the one element of "accessibility" that differs from "biblical universalism." This should not create the impression that the two views are in opposition to each other. Those who have serious questions about biblical universalism will have many of those questions answered by reading Tiessen's book. Those who were inclined to favor what I have been proposing will be grateful that Tiessen provides a great deal of biblical evidence that is missing from my writings.

Those interested in reading more about biblical universalism by Neal Punt can go to www.BiblicalUniversalism.com.

Loving

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

"I'll be there for you...."

Both of them were stressed to the max. He with the down-surge in client volume needed to cover the family's basic needs. She with two toddlers under the age of four, a father with Alzheimer's at the intermediate care home down the road, a four week-end retraining program to get through to upgrade a professional certificate to guarantee future employment in case her husband's business nosedived, as well as constant requests to lead the children's choir for the next two months. Yet, asking for help from the church community was difficult for them. They were always seen as having it together, and to admit they were experiencing hard times was just not how they wanted to portray themselves. And so they struggled on trying to be an island all to themselves.

Struggling with Friends

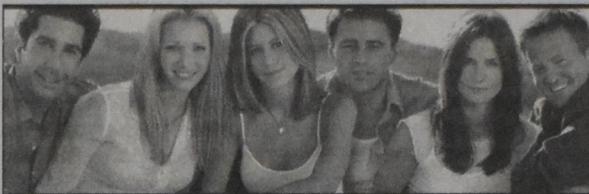
The above couple came to mind as I watched the finale of "Friends" on May 6th. Apparently, this sitcom was the most watched television show of the last decade. From the newspaper coverage the finale got, it is clear many fans will miss viewing the struggles of the six single adults living in New York. Some critics believe the series

was "comfort food" for a generation of disconnected yet idealistic teens, twenty- and thirty-year-olds.

The topics the show addressed were as contemporary, versatile and raunchy as the audience for which it was intended. Not much was left unveiled and unmentioned in word and deed. All of this between sharing cups of coffee at the Central Perk Coffee Shop and visiting one another between apartments. Still, the underlying premise of Friends was that struggles are part of life and "I'll be there for you, because you are there for me." In other words, struggles are to be shared.

Signs of failure?

As I pondered this natural and easy acceptance of sharing one another's struggles, I wondered why this would be more difficult for Christians. I know we are good in sharing pain around physical sickness and/or loss of loved ones. But we are not so



F.R.I.E.N.D.S

good at sharing other kinds of emotional, psychosocial or spiritual struggles such as marital and family difficulties as well as concerns around our faith life.

One reason for this is that the traditional church is most often experienced as an instructive institution that doles out explanatory directives regarding the word of God as well as biblical principals concerning everyday living. Inability to live up to these directives or principals makes us feel like failures and insecure in regards to our faith. And while scripture is all about real people living real lives, we do not want to recognize this kind of vulnerability in ourselves and often resort to playing arm chair quarterback criticizing other people's mistakes from a safe and analytical distance.

A place for the weary

I would much rather the church be a place for the wounded and weary. A place where we can be real and learn to live together with one another's strengths, weaknesses and quirks without judgement. A place where we watch out for each other and help each other grow in a healthy way. A place where the above couple would be free to share their hard times and ask for help along the way.

The church has come a long way from the dogmatic pulpit pounding days of old, and it would be refreshing for all of us who make up the church to take a few personal risks and become more vulnerable with each other. Who knows how God could use us when we decide to be more real with one another and acknowledge together that life is hard and we need one another's support.



Arlene Van Hove is a psychotherapist with Cascade Christian Counselling Association in Surrey, B.C.

Rediscovery of an old love

Didy Prinzen

Some time ago, I rediscovered an old love that had been more or less a part of me during my childhood and teen-age years, but had fallen by the wayside somewhere, way, way back. It now has filled a void in my life that had been there for a very long time, although I was unaware of it. It has made me wonder why we sometimes neglect and almost forget about a part of ourselves that God had perhaps ordained for us to enjoy all the way on our journey through life. This is what happened.

At the beginning of this year, when one

day I sat empty-handed and dispirited, even though there were lots of things I could do, my eye fell on our organ. And I suddenly remembered what that organ had meant to me many years ago.

Once it had been my pride and my joy. It had been with our family since the early 1960's and was a rebuilt, beautifully sounding old-fashioned pump-organ. It had taken up a proud place in our dining room before we even could afford to buy the furniture. I had initiated the purchase of it, not because I played it so well but I simply love organ music. It also had brought back treasured memories of my childhood - memories of my dad playing our organ in Holland, of family and friends singing. But what the organ had especially brought back to me was the memory of my youthful dream of learning to play it really well.

Our children had shown an interest in the organ and I had taught them in a simple way how to play a hymn. However, after a few years they had given preference to what was, at least in *their* eyes, a more modern instrument, and we had acquired a piano - an old Heinzman upright, for the sum of a few hundred dollars.

And with that, *my* favorite, the organ, was more or less forgotten. I seldom took time to play any more because I was busy

with the family and a part-time job. Besides, after the children had taken piano lessons, it had become a pleasure to listen to them play the piano. As a result, when they had grown up and left, the music, at least the *making* of music, had all but stopped in our house. I myself had lost sight of my dream.

Yet ... I had never been able to part with our organ. Even though years went by that I never touched it, I always seemed to be aware, albeit subconsciously, that it represented a part of myself, a part of my past to which I had become untrue; aware also that some day I would have to reconcile to that part of me again.

Faithfully every week I had dusted the organ, removed the ever-open hymnbook on it and shaken out the pretty cross-stitched cloth I had made to protect the keys. Not long ago we had its pedals recovered and had it tuned. Even after that was done, I still had not yet seen its great potential. It was sitting in an uneventful place in the family room downstairs, just a piece of furniture, a mere witness to happy family days.

But then one day early this year, it happened! The Lord opened my eyes and made me really *see* the organ, bringing back to my mind my old dream. Instantly, my spirit lifted. I saw a challenge in front of me and I thought, "What keeps me now from learning to play the organ again?"

With that thought, I eagerly got up and sat down on the organ bench. Leafing through the hymnbook I found an old favorite. And, haltingly, I began to play, making many mistakes but enjoying the familiar feeling of the keys and recognizing the fingering of a particular hymn that I had played a long time ago. And I became very excited ... knowing that I could master the art again. In my enthusiasm, I promised myself right then and there to practice every day.

I did not keep that promise, but often now I sit down to play the organ, and I'm getting better at it all the time. It has proven to be much more than just the challenge to learn to play again. For while I play, the words move from the printed page into my heart and I join the hymn writers in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. I have rediscovered a treasure that has lain buried far too long.

And now I wonder how could I have neglected for so long, not only my love for playing the organ, but also the ministry of our hymns that was so readily available to me *in my own home*? But it is not too late. As long as the Lord allows me I will continue to "make music" on my little organ and draw from that deep well of spiritual blessings that we possess in the psalms and hymns of our church.

It is a good thing to pursue an old dream.



Sexuality

Celibacy

...continued from page 11

exegetes think that Paul wanted to say: "It is better to marry than to burn in hell." This is possible, for the Greek verb for "to burn" is used for very hot fires, used in the refining of metal. Grosheide remarks that when people have to fight so hard with themselves to maintain their celibacy, this becomes an overriding activity with the sad result that special work in God's kingdom remains undone. Flames of passion often lead to loss of activity.¹⁴ F. L. Godet comments: "It is a good thing (kalon) to remain free from every bond, if one does so without sinning; but if sin is to be the result, it is better to marry; for sin is an evil, while marriage is not."¹⁵

Celibacy for the clergy as law

Celibacy for people in ecclesiastical offices has not always been mandatory. As a matter of fact, it had a hard time becoming law. Even today most churches don't require it. The Roman Catholic Church is the exception. Pope John Paul II insists on this requirement, even though many priests have left the priesthood. Both Hans Küng in Germany and Gregory Baum in Canada married and lost their ordination but continued to teach theology in their Universities, which was a recognition of their scholarly gifts and accomplishments.

In his *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte* Karl Heussi wrote that celibacy is not based on high esteem for virginity, but rather on the idea of a pagan culture that sexual intercourse makes people cultically unfit to serve in ecclesiastical offices.¹⁶

Even though celibacy was highly respected and recommended for the priesthood, especially for those in the higher ranks, it was not until after 300 A. D. that celibacy appeared for the first time in an ecclesiastical law. It was at the council of Elvira in Spain that celibacy became law for priests with higher ordinations. An attempt at the famous council of Nicea to make celibacy mandatory for the entire clergy did not succeed. Celibacy became law for the clergy in Spain and Africa under Pope Siricius (384-399). Augustine and Ambrose promoted this development strongly. Later still under Pope Leo I (440-461) and especially under Gregory the Great (590-604), celibacy became law for the entire clergy of the Western church. But in the 8th century church discipline lapsed. Many priests lived in concubinage. During the 12th century (the Lateran Councils) there was a time of restoration. But during the 13th and 14th centuries the church discipline deteriorated again during the time before the Reformation until the Council of Trent (1545-1563) reaffirmed the laws of celibacy.

In later years these laws were further elaborated in greater detail but basically only enforced. Then, however, came the 20th century with Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council. It brought a spirit of renewal. Ecclesiastical dress was not any longer required for monks and nuns. Mass could be celebrated in the language of the country. Many spiritual songs and hymns, even from protestant churches, became acceptable and were used in worship services. A new Catechism was written and received papal approval with less emphasis on the doctrine of transubstantiation, which made it easier for former Protestants to return to the Mother Church. But the laws on celibacy were not changed. Several movies glorified the figure of the humane, dedicated, celibate priest. There was,



'St. Jerome in Penitence' engraving by Albrecht Dürer c.1496-97

however, in the midst of all the changes a growing resistance against obligated celibacy. Hundreds of priests married their sweethearts and lost their ordination. The call for the abandonment of mandatory celibacy became ever stronger.

I remember vividly my priestly friend who confessed to me as he grew older and feared the loneliness of old age: "If I were a few years younger, I would perhaps also have married." The monk Thomas Merton seriously considered living in a common-law relationship with his girlfriend, whom we only know as nurse M.

We saw also during the 20th century an increase in sexual problems amongst the clergy. The number of homosexual priests was on the rise. Homosexuality became rampant in some seminaries. The same thing can be said about pedophilia. One nun complained about having been raped by a priest and is suing him. But Pope John Paul II remains adamant in his persistent resistance against any change in the celibacy laws. In the Greek Orthodox Church marriage is accepted for the clergy with the exception of the bishops.

This then is – in short – the story of celibacy with its ups and downs. According to many historians, there are more downs than ups.

It seems safe to conclude that the practice of celibacy is not easy. Many tried it in respect for a "higher" calling, but many also failed. Even those who succeeded in remaining celibate were not always happy and showed the image of frustrated singles.

Postscript

As far as I know, the Christian Reformed Church and many Evangelical churches have no official statements regarding celibacy. At the beginning of the 20th century celibate women, often called deaconesses, were involved in hospital work and missionary activities. But these churches have more to say about homosexuality. The Christian Reformed Church has three reports on this matter. Often homosexuality is condemned with references to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Yet, before we decide what to do about homosexuality, we should consider a statement from our Lord Jesus himself.

He said in response to a question from his disciples: "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it is given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it" (Matthew 19:11-12). It is clear from this word of our Lord that celibacy is a special gift, given to some but not to all.

The church errs when it demands more than the Lord does. The church should not make obedience impossible for some of its members. Jesus says also to our homosexual members: "my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28).

There are always the Pharisees and the hypocrites who like to shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces (Matthew 23:13).

Notes

1. F. W. Grosheide, *De Eerste Brief van den Apostel Paulus aan de Kerk te Korinthe* (Amsterdam: H. A. Van Bottenburg, 1932), p. 224.
2. F. F. Bruce, *I and 2 Corinthians* in New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1997; also Nashville: T. Nelson, 1997), p. 68.
3. Ibid., p. 66.
4. Paul. K. Jewett, "Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human" in his unpublished *A Neo-Evangelical Theology*, p. 220.
5. Ibid.
6. P. J. Pop, *De Eerste Brief van Paulus aan de Corinthiers* (Nijkerk, The Netherlands: Callenbach, 1965), p. 158.
7. Jesus did not speak about the way the dead will be in heaven, but rather about the final re-creation, using the words "at the resurrection."
8. Jewett, p. 219 and 219n.
9. John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, translated by John W. Fraser, (Grand Rapids, Mi: W. B. Eerdmans, 1960), p. 134f.
10. Jewett, p. 227. Jewett remarks that by this practice the one sacrament hindered the receiving of the other. And it is not only this that is remarkable, but it also shows that the "sacrament of Holy Communion" prevailed over that of marriage, (hence the capitals). This is in striking contrast with the Jewish custom of having intercourse after the ritual bath on Friday night just before the Sabbath, which still reflects the Old Testament appreciation of the body and of the celebration of marital intercourse.
11. Jewett, p. 218.
12. Calvin, p. 142.
13. Calvin, p. 157.
14. F. W. Grosheide, p. 224.
15. F. L. Godet, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), p. 330.
16. Karl Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte*, pp. 96-97.

Opinion

Mainly on Money

I am an avid tracker of the news, including the economic. The only time I look at TV during the day, is to have a peek at the markets. Part of that is personal. During my earning years I stashed away funds into my RRSP, which I self-directed.

Was fortunate there and never suffered losses. On the contrary. So now I am what the French call a 'rentier,' a person who lives off the 'rente,' the interest, of his investments.

Disclosure.

For a number of years now I've been involved in an organization with a large portfolio. Twice a year its board asks the different fund managers to explain their investment rationale, including an assessment of the future. Because I read a lot I often know as much about financial trends as these well-paid men – they are all males – who often look no further than the near future and ignore the long-term direction. I call them 'micro-money-men.' They play it safe, do what everybody else is doing and so their results are usually mediocre, right in there with the pack: lose when everybody does, gain when times are good.

I have a macro-view of the markets, I firmly believe that there are a number of factors which are totally new in the world, the foremost being the Weather and Peak Oil, and that we have to take these new phenomena into consideration when investing. A word or two about The Weather.

Let me give you a few lines from the October 2003 Pentagon Report: "...in addition to the atmospheric warming, there are erratic weather patterns: more floods... and prolonged droughts in grain-producing and coastal-agricultural areas..." I won't bother you with the rest of this frightening forecast as it makes more ominous reading than I ever dared to convey to you.

No wonder that a recent article in the *New York Times* questions the wisdom of the ever-growing settlements in the arid states, such as California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, mainly depending on water from a single source: the Colorado River. That entire region has suffered from a drought for five years, and if this persists the West will dry out and die out. Don't move there.

Combine this with aquifer depletion and the Peak Oil conditions, and a lot of alarm bells should be ringing when investing money, your own or somebody else's. Both volatile weather and the possibility of us running out of water and crude oil, means that I can predict with a good degree of certainty that we will have more inflation, which will have a profound influence on the money market, because inflation means high interest. High interest means that the value of houses will decrease as mortgage rates increase, perhaps rapidly, making it much harder for people to pay PIT, Principal, Interest and Taxes. The stock market

hates high interests because it throws the Price/Earnings ratio out of whack.

The USA is caught in a double bind because for oil it depends on a stable Saudi Arabia – increasingly iffy – and for money on the good graces of China and Japan who, between them, hold about a trillion dollars in US bonds. And China has tremendous problems. More about that later. So, before you invest, look at the macro-elements that influence the market.

Where to invest

I love acronyms. While I was running last week, my mind was busy forming a word that captures my idea of the investment strategy for the future. Running does that to me. I came up with POWIR, which stands for Peak - Oil - Weather - Interest - Rates, the three factors with a great bearing on money in the volatile times to come.

So where to invest for the future? Don't sue me if I am wrong, because nothing is guaranteed. I know that historically stocks have done better than bonds. But the past no longer indicates the future. Since everything depends on ample energy, when that ceases to be the case, nothing is safe.

The country most carbo-holic is the USA. Don't invest there. Its dollar will collapse when the bills come due. Don't invest in companies whose products depend on carbon fuels, such as GMC, Ford and chemical companies. Toyota and Honda may be an exception, as they do have energy-efficient cars.

Any stock that promotes conservation and self-help will do well. Basically there are three good possibilities: gold, especially gold pieces such as the Maple Leaf and the South African Rand will shoot up in price. It represents real value in a compact form. Inflation indexed bonds are available, guaranteed by the Government of Canada. Their rate of return always remains above the rate of inflation.

My last suggestion is more fundamental. If you are able, buy a rural property with a wood lot, an acre of two of clear land and its own well. A great degree of self-sufficiency will be the key to a more secure future.

China syndrome

A bit about China. Colin Powell was reported to have mentioned the so-called 'China' rule to Bush: "If you break it, you own it," referring, of course to Iraq, where the US is now busy self-destructing. The Iraq expense, for soldierly stuff alone, the war machine there, runs to \$5 billion per month, about the same as Vietnam some 30 years ago, in current dollars. Plus the repairs: "If you break it, you own it."

China was in the news in the late seventies with a film called "The China Syndrome," where, if I am correct, a nuclear plant in that populous country was portrayed as having serious problems, covered up, of course, but a courageous woman, Jane

Fonda, saved the world from disaster. Or something to that effect.

Well, today we have another China Syndrome. Also covered up, of course. The world is hooked on China, which has become the growth engine of the world. It has, overnight almost, been converted from a backward, rural region to the universal manufacturing hub. China now absorbs so much of the oil, the raw materials, the copper, the coal, the iron ore, that world-wide the flame of inflation is being fanned.

But that isn't what the insiders fear. A bit of inflation will not imperil the global economy. China, by its lonely self, is praised because it has placed the entire Asian economy on a path to prosperity: it is soaking in imports from all over that region and has restored the pace of growth the region enjoyed prior to the 1997 financial fiasco. So cheers to China, but the cheer is mixed with fear: the world's money-men live in fear because all is not well in the world's oldest civilization, where they suspect a meltdown as serious for the world as the one in that Fonda film, but then financial.

It's China's banking system this time. It's the way money is handled in China. The core problem is that its banking system hands out money based not on what you know about the borrowers' business, on merit, but who you know, connections. The banker says to the client: "You need it, you get it." Where in the Western world companies get most of their liquid assets by issuing shares, with the stockholders carrying the risk, in China banks provide the capital and are on the hook for better or worse.

Pyramid loans

One reason for this generosity is that Chinese banks have lots of money: the country lacks old-age provisions, and so people save a lot, and, because a dollar saved cannot be spent, the domestic market is small. Thus, in order to generate cash, companies export, selling at cost or even below to cover debt service. And this is where it starts to hurt: there is a limit to how long China's manufacturing base can last in this profit-

less position.

It also is a system without checks and balances, without bankruptcies or bad debts, and the result is that even the most unhealthy businesses continue to grow, because banks keep on giving them more money, until the economy, kept alive by pyramiding loans that undergird an increasingly dysfunctional system, has a day of reckoning.

So far this has been avoided in three ways. First, there is the debt piled upon debt continuously, simply to keep bad loans off the books and keep public confidence in the banks and the banking system. Second, companies implement aggressive export programs to generate cash flow. Finally, programs are put into place to induce foreign investors to put money into joint ventures, whose boards are controlled by Asian companies. This prevents foreign investors from really looking at the books of the Asian parent companies, but allows the boards to make decisions that transfer money from the joint venture into the parent company.

But – there always is a but in my columns – foreign investors now fear that, as non-performing loans pile up and the banks wind up with more demand for hand-outs than they can supply, it becomes difficult to keep the banking system afloat. The Chinese government knows it has a major crisis on its hands and has told the banks to stop lending for a short period, so that the problem can be rectified. But this is not a technical problem that can be cured by stopping the money for a week or two. This is a banking system nearing meltdown.

We live in a global economy and have been riding the boom with the Chinese tiger and, in more ways than one, have fastened our financial future to this frail foundation.

*Bert Hielema's website has been updated, now including all past columns as well as other writings:
www.geocities.com/hielemab*

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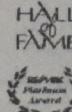
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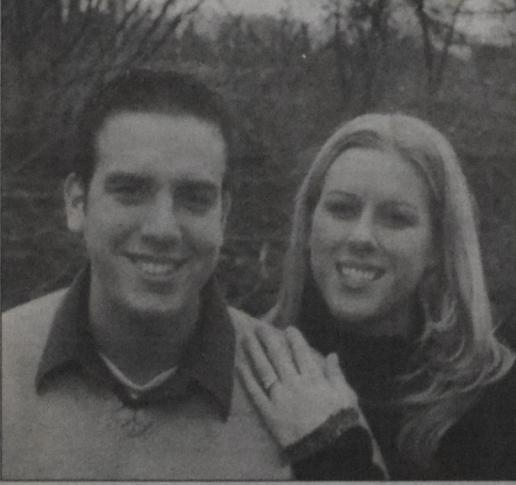
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<p>DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION: Christian Courier is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.</p> <p>RATES (GST added to all rates listed) All personal and family announcements: \$16.00 per column inch (P.I.) (2" wide) rose@christiancourier.ca</p> <p>Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: \$18.20 P.I. ads@christiancourier.ca</p> <p>PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of \$25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged P.I., but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. Please note that we cannot use a faxed photo. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.</p> <p>SUBMITTING YOUR AD: fax: 905-682-8313 e-mail: see above Mail: Christian Courier, 1 Hiscott St St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7</p> <p>OTHER INFORMATION: Christian Courier reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style. Please provide us with clear copy. CC is not responsible for any errors due to hand written or phoned-in advertisements.</p>	<p>Birthdays</p> <p>Born: June 21, 1914, Burgum (Fr), The Netherlands</p> <p>John (Johannes) Rauwerda</p> <p>With thankfulness to God, we hope to celebrate the 90th Birthday of our Dad, Opa and Great-Opa</p> <p>"I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations." Ps. 89:1</p> <p>An Open House will be held on Monday, June 21, from 2-4 p.m. at Shalem: 3010 - 51 Street S.W., Calgary AB T3E 6V8</p> <p>Address: #308, 2850 - 51 St SW, Calgary AB T3E 6S7</p> 	<p>CATHARINE W. VANDERIET</p> <p>at the age of 91 went home to her Lord and Maker after a brief illness. She was a resident of Holland Christian homes in Brampton and was predeceased by her husband Coenraad.</p> <p>She is lovingly remembered by: Dick & Jan Farenhorst David (deceased), Stephanie, James Anco & Christine Farenhorst Emberlee, Christopher, Elineke, Charity, Benjamin Paul & Henry Spoelstra Jordan, Elizabeth (Buffy), Dylan Dan & Joanne Sandbulle Renae, Paul, Janelle, Ruth, Seth, Katrina Roy & Marie Turkstra Aaron, Jonathan, David, Nathan</p> <p>Tante To's favorite verse is from Psalm 27:4</p> <p>"One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."</p>
<p>Birth</p> <p>With joy and thanksgiving to our Lord Brandon & Trish Murray (nee Scholten) announce the arrival of</p> <p>Cole Stephen</p> <p>weighing 7 lb. 12 oz. on May 8, 2004 in Grand River Hospital in Kitchener.</p> <p>Cole is the 6th grandchild for Jack & Theresa Scholten and the 1st grandchild for Stephen & Sherri Murray. He is the 7th great-grandchild for Alice Van Gysel and the 1st for Jim & Joan Murray and the 1st for Dorothy King & Rudy Boyer.</p>	<p>Personal</p> <p>A woman in her mid 50's (dutch born, CRC background, divorced for 10 years) would like to meet a Christian man. Please respond to: Christian Courier File #2743 1 Hiscott St St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7</p> <p>A widow in her late 60's would like to meet a sincere Christian man. Please respond to: Christian Courier File #2740 1 Hiscott St St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7</p>	<p>Obituaries</p> <p>Zwartsluis The Netherlands November 28, 1923 Terrace, B.C. Canada April 14, 2004</p> <p>DERK VANDE VELDE</p> <p>Peacefully, the Lord called our much loved father and grandfather home to eternal glory. He is predeceased by his wife Annie.</p> <p>Dear father of: Ruby & Randy Huisman Henry & Susan Vande Velde John & Hilda Vande Velde Bill & Trudy Vande Velde Jenny & Chris Wyssen Rolf & Sharon Vande Velde Dick & Corrina Vande Velde JoAnn & Brian Slater Albert & Nancy Vande Velde Wilma & Keith VandenBroek Beloved Grampa of 28 grandchildren. We will miss him.</p> <p>"I trust in You, O Lord, I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands." Psalm 31:14-15a</p>
<p>Wedding</p>  <p>John & Marge Postuma and Jasper & Nancy Flikkema are thrilled to announce the forthcoming marriage of their children</p> <p>LAURA MIRIAM AND JONATHAN WILLIAM on Saturday, June 5, 2004, at First CRC, Hamilton. May their love always reflect Christ's love.</p>	<p>Anniversaries</p> <p>We are so pleased to announce the upcoming 50th Wedding Anniversary of our parents and grandparents,</p> <p>PETA AND DIRK VELTHUIZEN (nee Verkerk).</p> <p>They were married May 31, 1954 in Doorn, The Netherlands. Their wedding text has been, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here." Exodus 33:15</p> <p>Dirk Geraldine (& Ken) - Carolina, Benjamin, Jason, Kimberson Bart & Alice - Jolene, Peter, Mike, Alisa, Andrea & Jochen - Carlos Marlene & John - Jody, Mike, Erika, Nikki Tim & Crystal - Clarissa, Matthew</p> <p>You are invited to an Open House in their honor to be held at First CRC, Guelph, on May 29, 2 - 4 p.m.</p> <p>Correspondence: 28 Campion Ave, Guelph ON N1H 5L4</p>	<p>Winsum, the Netherlands</p> <p>"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High." Psalm 92:1 (KJV)</p> <p>On April 8, 2004 our dear husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather</p> <p>KLAAS KNOOPS</p> <p>born October 11, 1915, entered into the joy of his Lord.</p> <p>Jitse A Knops-deBoer Sap, Virgil, Ontario</p> <p>Sanneke & John Kok and family, Sioux Center, Iowa Elsje Zwart & Richard Klajnscek, and family, Gloucester, Massachusetts Doro & Arend Bakker and family, Nanaimo, British Columbia Judy & Lee Hardy and family, Grand Rapids, Michigan Wendy & Paul Saunders and family, Wainfleet, Ontario Irene Payne, Toronto, Ontario</p> <p>Predeceased by grandchildren Peter Klaas Kok and Samantha Ellen Zwart, and by son-in-law Hendrik Zwart.</p> <p>Correspondence address: Mrs. J. A. Knoops PO Box 500, Virgil ON L0S 1T0</p> <p>December 2, 1931, Amsterdam</p> <p>Montreal, April 13, 2004</p> <p>ALBERT BUDDING</p> <p>Albert was given rest from his suffering with cancer and went home to be with his Lord on April 13, 2004.</p> <p>"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'" Psalm 91</p> <p>Beloved husband for 47 years of Coby Budding (nee Post). Dear father, father-in-law and Opa of: Lidy & Steve Fraser, Scarborough, ON Stefanie and Elyse Peter & Nancy Budding, Winnipeg, MB Zachary, Aaron, and Zoë Albert & Susan Budding, Cambridge, ON Grant, Kristine, Nicole and Michelle Renee & John Gray, Ottawa, ON</p> <p>Dear brother and brother-in-law of Geertje, Cornelius and Helene of the Netherlands, and Nan Budding of Toronto.</p> <p>A service of remembrance and thanksgiving was held at the Lakeshore General Hospital in Montreal on May 8, 2004.</p> <p>Correspondence: Coby Budding, c/o R. Gray 35 Barnstable Dr, Nepean ON K2J 1Z5</p> 

MAY 24, 2004

Events / Classifieds / Travel

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8:00 p.m. - Program
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May 10 issue



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Events/Advertising**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

Items appearing in this column are run free of charge if they advertise an admission-free event, if they accompany an ad for the same event, or at the discretion of CC.

In case of free listing, space limitations apply.

The charge otherwise is \$7.50 per line, or \$1.50 per 1/3 line, per insertion

May 22 THE MAYFLOWER Christian Mixed Choir, 8 p.m. at Mountainview CRC, 290 Main St. E Grimsby, ON. See ad this issue.

May 24 THE MAYFLOWER Christian Mixed Choir from the Netherlands, Chalmers United Church - 8 p.m., 15 Van Sittart Av. Woodstock, ON. See ad this issue.

May 26 THE MAYFLOWER Christian Mixed Choir from the Netherlands, St. George's Anglican Church, 8 p.m., 99 Woolwich St - Guelph, ON. See ad this issue

May 27 THE MAYFLOWER Christian Mixed Choir from the Netherlands, Redeemer University College 8 p.m. 777 Garner Rd E. - Ancaster, ON. See ad this issue.

May 28 Retirement celebration, Han Vandezande, 7:30 pm. at London District Christian Secondary School, 24 Braeside Avenue, London, ON. Best wishes may be sent to office@ldcss.on.ca

May 29 First Christian Reformed Church of Montreal will celebrate its 50th anniversary. Ph: 1-514-684-4430 or E-mail: georgelucy@aei.ca

May 30 First Christian Reformed Church of Hamilton, Ontario will celebrate its 75th Anniversary in a service of praise and thanksgiving. See ad on page 19.

May 30 A dutch service will be held in the Ancaster Chr Ref church Sunday at 3 p.m. Rev Vander Plaat preaching

June 4 Appreciation Dinner for Jake Vriend, principal, John Calvin Christian School, Guelph, ON. After 26 years of faithful service, Jake has taken a position at Stouffville Christian School for the fall. Dinner to be held at The Arboretum Centre, University of Guelph, Friday at 6 p.m. Tickets \$34. contact Lyn Marfisi at 519-822-0993 for more info.

June 9 Hollandse Dag First CRC, Kingston, ON Spreker, Rev. Jacob Kuntz. " Samen met alle heiligen " For more info call (613)546-5615

June 9 Hollandse Dag 10 a.m. at the Moorefield Community Centre. See ad this issue.

June 9 Retirement celebrations for Mr. John DeVries at Hamilton District Christian High School, 7:30 pm. - 9 p.m. Congratulatory messages can be sent to: jdevries28years@hdch.org

June 26, 27 Fellowship CRC in Brighton, Ont. will be celebrating 25 years of God's faithfulness. A special service will be held on Sunday. For more information please call 613-475-3836

June 26, 27 Retirement events for Henry Boehm, at John Calvin CRC, Truro, NS. For more info: 902-895-3540 or rachelboehm@ns.sympatico.ca

June 27 Heritage Service, Zion CRC, 409 Adelaide Ave. E. (at Central Park), Oshawa at 3:00 pm. Rev. John Veenstra, "De hemelvaart van Christus." A Social hour will follow the service.



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**First Christian Reformed Church
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will celebrate its 75th Anniversary in a service of praise and thanksgiving, on

Sunday, May 30, 2004.

Former pastor Andrew Kuyvenhoven will preach.

The congregation welcomes all friends and former members to the service and a celebration reception following.

For more information, call

905-528-3826

or visit the church website at
<http://firsthamilton.ca/>.



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MONDAY MAY 24, 2004

Chalmers United Church – 8:00 PM
15 Van Sittart Av. – Woodstock, Ontario

WEDNESDAY MAY 26, 2004

St. George's Anglican Church – 8:00 PM
99 Woolwich St – Guelph, Ontario

THURSDAY MAY 27, 2004

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News

Manager Hired for 'Sea to Sea' Bike Tour



Burlington, Ont. — Ed Witvoet has been hired by the Christian Reformed Church to coordinate the logistics for next year's cross-Canada bicycle tour called "Sea to Sea With the CRC."

As tour manager, Witvoet will spend the next 17 months planning the many facets of the tour, including the route, accommodations, food, registration of cyclists, and integrating the tour with weekly celebration rallies.

An avid cyclist, Witvoet, 42, pedaled across Canada with a tour group in 1994. He says that experience will help.

"I know the ride is doable for people of all walks of life," he said, "and I understand the terrain — the long stretches between towns in the Prairies and the hills in northern Ontario. I'm also familiar with the different road systems in Canada and the general weather conditions."

The tour is scheduled for June 22 to Sept. 4, 2005. Plans call for a rider from each of the CRC's more than 240 Canadian congregations to cycle across Canada. The tour will commemorate the CRC's 100th anniversary in Canada, build unity among Christian Reformed churches and ministry centers, and generate enthusiasm and support for the denomination's church-planting initiative

called "Deep Roots, New Branches."

"Because of the size of the tour, it may seem overwhelming," Witvoet says. "I understand how a tour like this works for 10 or 30 riders, but for this I'll just have to think bigger. The size will definitely create some logistical challenges."

He will be assisted by a group of volunteers and will report to and participate in a task force appointed to organize the project. He will be the main contact person for the tour after he takes up the position in mid-May.

Witvoet lives in Ancaster, Ont. with his wife, Denise, and their son. They are members of Fellowship CRC, Ancaster.



Mel Gibson's *The Passion* a hit in Arab world

Ross Dunn

Jerusalem (ENI) — Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* has become a surprise hit in the Arab world, among both Muslims and Christians, who often have different motivations for viewing the controversial movie.

While Christian Arabs, including Palestinians, are examining questions of faith, many Muslims appear to be taking an interest because of an upsurge in hatred against Jews now sweeping across the Middle East.

He said he was moved and at the same time aghast at the graphic depiction of Jesus' final hours, including his flogging at the hands of Roman soldiers before his crucifixion. "You don't imagine the torture, the blood, the screaming," he said.

Shammas said that the film was true to the biblical accounts but he did not believe it would spark hatred amongst Palestinian or Arab Christians against Jews.

"The Jewish [religious leaders] took Christ to Pontius Pilate and they threatened him politically into carrying out the crucifixion," he said. "This had to be shown. To do otherwise would dilute the biblical account. [But] I don't think there is anything that shows anti-Semitic tendencies."

The film has also caught the attention of the Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, who held a private screening with his advisors at his battered headquarters in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

"It went very well," Shammas told ENI. "Many showed up, including foreign residents, as well as Palestinians."



But the comments of Arafat's chief spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeinah, who is a Palestinian Greek Orthodox Christian from Bethlehem, stirred more controversy.

"The Palestinians are still daily being exposed to the kind of pain Jesus was exposed to during his crucifixion," he said after viewing the movie.

Such comments did, however, not sit well with other Palestinian Christians. Shammas said politics and religion should not be mixed. "Palestinians are suffering but it is not that kind of suffering," he said.

The Rev. Alex Awad, a Methodist pastor who serves at the Baptist Church in east Jerusalem, also distanced himself from the comments of Arafat's spokesman. He said that the suffering of Jesus should not be likened to that of others.

"The suffering of Christ is for all humanity," Awad, a native of Jerusalem, told ENI. "He suffered for us all." He too had a high opinion of the movie saying it was close to the New Testament accounts about Jesus. "I thought it was well done," he said.

But he also expressed concerns that Muslim Arabs are seeing the film because of what he called a "love of anti-Semitism [against Jews]" raging across the Middle East. He was reacting to reports that even conservative Arab governments had dropped their strict censorship rules and allowed the movie to be shown uncut.

The Canadian Council of Churches celebrates its diamond jubilee

Ferdy Baglo

Vancouver, Canada (ENI) — The Canadian Council of Churches which celebrates its diamond jubilee on May 13 was founded as "a kind of Protestant lobby." But now it brings together diverse denominations including Anglican, Roman Catholic, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, says its president, Professor Richard Schneider.

"Instead of trying to plot the perfect church, we are coming to the table as we are," said Schneider, from the Orthodox Church in America's Archdiocese of Canada. He is the first Orthodox to be president of the council.

A decision in 1996 to make the council more inclusive by adopting a looser decision-making model was "a really big breakthrough in how ecumenism works," Schneider told ENI in an interview.

This forum model allowed denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church and the strongly-Protestant Christian Reformed Church — "if you can think of two more unlikely bedfellows" — to become full members of the council.

"The vision of the forum is not a power thing, not a numbers thing, not a money thing," noted Schneider. "From the smallest to the biggest they have a voice. It only works appropriately if it is brought in humility and not in arrogance."

The idea also attracted attention beyond Canada's borders, Schneider said, with the Geneva-based World Council of Churches expressing interest in the Canadian council's consensus style decision-making procedures.

"What that means is that in the forum, your truth is valid at the same time that you have to acknowledge that another witness, another confession, might have perceived the truth in some prophetic way that you need to hear."

Although members of the Canadian Council of Churches have different positions on such issues as abortion, same-sex marriage and the role of women in the church, they made a common effort on many other issues, including acid rain, biotechnology and child poverty.

The council has taken no position on the issue of same-sex marriage, the subject of heated debate in Canada and on which there are strong differences between denominations.

The anniversary was marked on Thursday, May 13 at a special service at Yorkminster Park Baptist Church in Toronto, the site of the church council's first ecumenical worship service 60 years ago. Another event is being planned for October to which the WCC general secretary, the Rev. Sam Kobia, has been invited.

The move appears to have been prompted because of a growing tendency to equate all Jews with Israelis, who many Arabs believe should not have been allowed to establish their own state in the region.

"It is clearly a backlash to the claims by Jewish lobbies that this film is bad," Alfred Mutua, a Dubai-based film director and university professor, told reporters. "And anything Jews say is bad becomes interesting in this part of the world."

In Kuwait, a top Shiite Muslim cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer al-Mohri, urged his government to allow screenings of the film, claiming it exposed the role of Jews in killing Jesus, who is a minor prophet according to Islamic beliefs.

Methodist pastor Awad blamed Jewish leaders for sparking an interest among Muslims by their opposition to the film. "I think they really shot themselves in the foot," he said. "Many people in the Islamic world want to see the film just because of that." Awad said this interest was also being fuelled by Israel's "actions against Palestinians".

At the same, he said that the political controversy surrounding the film should not be allowed to diminish its positive importance in spreading the message of Jesus.

"Mel Gibson was able to do what many churches have had a harder time trying to do — spreading 'The Word' across the world," he said.